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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Govt to not denotify Waqf land till 5 May

Centre tells SC it will not add members to Central Waqf Council as court grants it 1 week to file reply

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Centre on Thursday assured Supreme Court that it will not denotify Waqf properties — including those categorised as "Waqf by user" — or make any appointments to the Central Waqf Council until 5 May.

The assurance came amidst multiple challenges to the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta informed a bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan that the legislation should not be stayed.

He argued that staying statutory provisions would be "rare" and harsh, since some Waqf properties allegedly encroach on private land.

The CJI responded, "We don't want the position to change. Parliament makes laws, the executive decides, and the judiciary interprets." The court has granted the Centre one week to file its detailed response.

Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, representing a state government, said "heavens are not going to fall if the interim order is not passed for a week or so".

Visitors outside the SC on Thursday as it continues hearing on Waqf Act *PHOTO: PTI*

The bench also decided to hear only five of 72 pleas before it. About 72 petitions, including those by AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, the DMK, Anwar Basha former chairman Karnataka State Board of AUQAF represented by advocate Tariq Ahmed, Congress MPs Imran Pratapgarhi and Mohammad Jawed, were against the law.

Senior counsel Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Singhvi, Huzefa Ahmadi appear for petitioners. While appointing three lawyers as the nodal counsel, the bench asked the advocates to decide among themselves who was going to argue.

The court, on Wednesday, was miffed over the inclusion of non-Muslims in the central waqf council and boards and asked the Centre whether it was willing to include Muslims in Hindu trusts.

HC flays State for allowing protest

Karnataka High Court criticised the State government for permitting a protest against the Waqf Act. Justice M Nagaprasanna observed that allowing such a demonstration was inappropriate. *—PTI*

Judiciary cannot set timeline for President: Dhankhar

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said India had not bargained for a democracy where judges will legislate, perform Executive functions and act as a "super Parliament".

This comes after Supreme Court for the first time prescribed that the President should decide on the bills reserved for her consideration by the governor within three months from the date such reference is received.

Addressing a group of Rajya Sabha interns, he said, "So we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament, and absolutely have no accountability because law of the land does not apply to them".

Dhankhar also questioned the lack of an FIR in the discovery of wads of burnt cash case from the residence of a High Court judge, wondering whether a "category beyond law" has secured immunity from prosecution.

Jagdeep Dhankhar *PHOTO: PTI*

"If the event had taken place at his (common man's) house, the speed would have been an electronic rocket. Now it is not even a cattle cart," Dhankhar said. *—PTI*

SC extends tenure of untainted teachers in WB

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

In a major relief, the Supreme Court on Thursday extended the services of untainted teachers, whose appointments were cancelled in the West Bengal recruitment scam, until 31 December.

A bench of CJI Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar considered the state's plea that mass terminations had severely impacted school functioning. The extension applies only to assistant teachers for classes 9-12 and excludes Grade C and D staff.

The court directed the state and the West Bengal School Service Commission to initiate fresh recruitment by 31 May and complete the process by December. *—PTI*

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HC rebukes couple for marrying without parents nod

PRAYAGRAJ, 17 APRIL

The Allahabad High Court observed that couples who marry of their own will against the wishes of their parents cannot claim police protection as a right unless there is a real threat their life.

Justice Saurabh Srivastava made this observation while hearing a writ petition filed by Shreya Kesarwani and her husband seeking police protection and a direction for the private respondents not to interfere in their peaceful marital life. The court can provide security to a couples in deserving cases but in the absence of any threat, such a couple must "learn to support each other". *—PTI*

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Truckers call off strike after assurance from govt

BENGALURU 17 APRIL

The indefinite lorry strike that had crippled supply chains across the State for three days was called off Thursday. This comes after a breakthrough meeting between the lorry owners' association and Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy. After three days of deadlock that reportedly caused losses exceeding Rs 4,500 crore per day, the Federation of Karnataka State Lorry Owners and Agents Association announced the withdrawal of the strike. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Pak must vacate illegally occupied territories: India on jugular barb

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Jammu and Kashmir's only relationship with Pakistan is that of Islamabad vacating the illegally occupied part of the Union Territory, India said on Thursday

New Delhi strongly trashed Pakistan Army Chief Gen Asim Munir's remarks on the region.

In his address at an event in Islamabad this week, Gen Munir described Kashmir as the "jugular vein" of Pakistan and asserted that no one would be able to separate Kashmir from his country.

"How can anything foreign be in a jugular vein? This is a Union territory of India. ," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

On Pakistan's attempts to wash its hands off the 26/11 terror accused Tahawwur Rana, Jaiswal said: "Pakistan may try very hard but its reputation as the epicentre of global terrorism will not diminish."

Rana, 64, was brought to India on April 10 after all hurdles for his extradition were removed by the US.

A Canadian national of Pakistani origin, Rana is now in the custody of Indian investigating agencies.

India, China to resume Mansarovar Yatra'

India and China are making preparations to resume the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra soon besides looking at restarting direct flights as part of broader efforts to normalise the bilateral ties that came under severe strain following the border row in eastern Ladakh.

The pilgrimage to Kailash Mansarovar in China's Tibet Autonomous Region and direct flights between the two countries have been suspended since 2020 in view of the military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. *—PTI*

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Cabinet meet on caste census ends without decision

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

A special Cabinet meeting convened to deliberate on Karnataka's contentious Social and Educational Survey report, commonly known as the caste census, ended inconclusively on Thursday. No major decision was taken, with ministers seeking further technical details and clarifications from senior officials.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil stated that while discussions covered parameters like population, backwardness, and economic criteria, they were incomplete. A final decision is now expected at the next Cabinet meeting on 2 May.

The meeting reportedly remained cordial, although Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy noted that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had asked ministers to submit their opinions—verbally or in writing—before the next session. While rumours suggested a few ministers expressed reservations in a sharp tone, this was not confirmed.

The survey, which cost around Rs 160 crore, has triggered controversy. Dominant communities—Veerashaiva-Lingayats and Vokkaligas—have called it "unscientific" and demanded a fresh survey, citing undercounting and division of subcastes across OBC categories. These claims challenge traditional perceptions of caste strength and have made the report politically sensitive.

Meanwhile, Dalit and OBC leaders have demanded the report be made public and implemented.

Patil clarified that 94.17 per cent of the population was covered in the survey, dismissing concerns over population misrepresentation. However, he confirmed no discussion took place on the population data of Veerashaiva-Lingayats and Vokkaligas during the meeting. Commissioned in 2015 and finalised in February 2024, the report was presented to the Cabinet for the first time on 11 April. *—PTI*

WB woman drugged, raped in M'luru

MANGALURU, 17 APRIL

A woman in her twenties from West Bengal has alleged that she was drugged and "sexually assaulted" after arriving in Mangaluru on 16 April, police said.

The woman, who had been working at a plywood factory in Kerala, travelled to the city by train with a male acquaintance. After a dispute, she parted ways with him and took an auto, they added.

According to her statement on Wednesday, the auto driver helped repair her damaged phone and offered her food. He later allegedly gave her a spiked drink, causing her to lose consciousness. She later found her-self in a car with three men, including the auto driver, and was reportedly abandoned on the roadside after she raised an alarm, police said.

She approached a nearby house, where residents contacted the police. She was taken to a hospital for treatment.

After regaining consciousness, she told police she suspected sexual assault during the period she was unconscious. *—PTI*

UP mute & deaf Dalit girl raped

RAMPUR, 17 APRIL

A man was arrested for allegedly raping and severely injuring an 11-year-old deaf-and-mute girl, 7, according to officials. He however put up a fight before arrest. Police said there was exchange of fire due to which Daan Singh 24, was injured. The girl is in severe shock and her condition is stated to be critical, police said. The girl displayed fear and was unable to communicate details of the assault and had bite marks and injuries all over her body. The girl went missing from outside her house on Tuesday, prompting a search. The girl's father, a farmer, searched villages and made announcements through mosques. She was found naked, unconscious and bleeding from her private parts in a field. *—PTI*

Migrant couple found dead at construction site in City

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

In a chilling discovery, the decomposed bodies of a migrant couple were found under suspicious circumstances at an under-construction building in an upscale Dollars Colony locality of Sanjay Nagar on Thursday morning.

Residents in the vicinity alerted the police after a foul smell began emanating from the building.

Following an inspection, the police identified the deceased as Mehboob, 45, and his wife Parveen, 35, hailing from Yadgir taluk. It was learnt that the couple had been working at the site for the past year, Mehboob as a mason and Parveen assisting with construction labour.

- The officers found Mehboob's body lying on the floor with visible injury marks, while Parveen was discovered hanging.

The officers found Mehboob's body lying on the floor with visible injury marks, while Parveen was discovered hanging inside the same structure. Investigators suspect the deaths occurred at least three days ago. According to police sources, the couple had recently returned from their hometown after Ramadan.

Senior police officials, including the Deputy Commissioner of Police Saidulu Adavath and local inspector, visited the scene. Both bodies have been sent to MS Ramaiah Hospital for post-mortem examination. A case has been registered and Sanjaynagar police have launched a detailed investigation to determine the exact cause of death.

Forensic teams have also been roped in to assist with the probe. *—Salar News*

IN NORTH KARNATAKA

Farmers in despair as cabbage sells for 60p

BELAGAVI, 17 APRIL

Cabbage prices in North Karnataka have plummeted from Rs 15 to Rs 60 paisa per kg, reportedly due to an oversupply. Unable to recover even transportation costs, many farmers have stopped sending their produce to markets and are instead allowing livestock to graze on the unsold crop.

On 16 April, hundreds of angry farmers dumped quintals of cabbage on the premises of the Belagavi Deputy Commissioner's office.

Appasaheb Desai, Belagavi taluk President of farmers body Karnataka Rajya Raita Sangh Mattu Hasiru Sene, said farmers were lured by profitable prices (Rs 15) in January and February. As a result, farmers started growing cabbage in large numbers.

Goa, which relies on Karnataka for several essential commodities also increased the quantity of cabbage bought *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

"However, a surge in supply made the price fall. The government has failed to protect farmers' interests and has lost control over wholesale merchants," he said. Desai pointed out the dire economics: cabbage is being auctioned at Rs 0.60 per kg, while a single sapling costs Rs 6.

Farmers in Belagavi, Khanapur, and Gokak often prefer cultivating vegetables over long-term crops, making them particularly vulnerable to price crashes, said Desai.

Satish Patil, a vegetable merchant in the government APMP campus in Belagavi, said wholesale merchants from Bengaluru were purchasing the cheap vegetables in bulk quantity for Rs 1 per kg and selling them for Rs 10 to Rs 15 per kg in Bengaluru and other parts of the State.

Goa, which relies on northern Karnataka for several essential commodities also increased the quantity of cabbages bought as the prices fell. *—Salar News*

Caste census move to embarrass DKS: BJP MLA

MYSURU, 17 APRIL

Krishnaraja BJP MLA TS Srivatsa on Thursday alleged that the Congress government is using the caste census issue as a ploy to divert public attention from its failures, corruption, and internal conflicts. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Srivatsa claimed that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has brought the caste census, also known as the Socio-Economic and Educational Survey, into the spotlight not to benefit the people, but as a tactic to safeguard his position and embarrass Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar — a strong contender for the chief minister's post, should the Congress high command consider a leadership change. Srivatsa criticised the caste census report as outdated and unscientific, pointing out that it was conducted a decade ago. "With major socio-economic changes over the years, a fresh and accurate survey is necessary," he argued. *—Salar News*

MM Hills Temple collects ₹3.26 cr in 35 days

MYSURU, 17 APRIL

The Malemahadeshwara Temple at MM Hills in Hanur taluk, Chamarajanagar district, recorded a hundi collection of Rs 3.26 crore over 35 days, from 11 March to 15 April. The counting, held in the presence of MM Hills Development Executive Secretary AE Raghu, revealed Rs 3.20 crore in cash, 47 grams of gold, 2.2 kg of silver, 11 foreign currencies, and 20 banned Rs 2,000 notes. Executive Secretary M Raghu attributed the surge in donations to Amavasya, Ugadi jathra, government holidays, and the Shakti scheme. Earlier this year, during Mahashivaratri, the temple had collected Rs 3.18 crore. MM Hills temple is now the second-highest revenue-generating Muzrai temple in State, after Kukke Subramanya Temple, with an annual turnover of Rs 100 crore. *—Salar News*

Thieves loot gold from locked house in Hunsur

MYSURU, 17 APRIL

Thieves broke into a locked house in Mookanahalli village of Hunsur taluk in the early hours of Thursday and escaped with 200g of gold jewellery and Rs 1 lakh in cash, amounting to a total loss of around Rs 15 lakh. The burglary occurred at the residence of Swamigowda while the family was away on a trip. The thieves gained entry into the house and accessed the locker where the valuables were stored. The theft came to light when Swamigowda and his family returned home on Thursday morning and found their house ransacked. A case has been registered at the Hunsur Town Police Station. *—Salar News*

Truckers call off strike after assurance from govt

Minister Reddy promises to act on demands in 3 months

BENGALURU 17 APRIL

The withdrawal of the strike is expected to bring relief to farmers, traders, and consumers alike as essential goods begin moving again after a near standstill **PHOTO: PTI**

The indefinite lorry strike that had crippled supply chains across the State was called off following a breakthrough meeting between the lorry owners' association and Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Thursday evening.

After three days of deadlock that reportedly caused losses exceeding Rs 4,500 crore per day, the Federation of Karnataka State Lorry Owners and Agents Association (FKSLOAA) announced the withdrawal of the strike. Association president GR Shanmugappa confirmed that the government has assured action on their core demands.

Among the key issues raised were diesel price hikes, no-entry time restrictions, harassment by RTO officials, and problems at border checkposts. He also noted that the Minister assured attention to no-entry zone restrictions beyond 5pm, which had been hampering timely goods movement.

However, Reddy said, "Their demand for diesel price reduction and abolition of toll plaza was unrelated to us. I told them to first speak to the Centre before coming to us."

About the no-entry inside the City, the Minister said he will speak to the City Police Commissioner.

"I have told the truck drivers to complete their work between 7am and 8am," Reddy said. Reddy said he also agreed for the online fine payment for the truckers.

The Minister said he has also assured them to set up more centres to renew their driving licence.

The strike, which had halted movement of over six lakh vehicles, had severely affected supply of vegetables, fruits, flowers, LPG cylinders, and industrial materials, particularly in City and neighbouring states.

The withdrawal of the strike is expected to bring relief to farmers, traders, and consumers alike as essential goods begin moving again after a near standstill. *—Salar News*

METRO HORROR

Pvt firm contractor, manager booked for auto driver's death

BENGALURU 17 APRIL

Contractor and manager of private firm overseeing Metro construction, and truck driver have been charged with negligence and rash driving causing the death of the auto driver in City here on Tuesday.

The deceased Khasim Saab, a 35-year-old auto rickshaw driver from Sidlaghatta who had been residing in Bengaluru with his family, died on the spot after a viaduct segment being transported for Metro work toppled and crushed his vehicle near Kogilu Cross.

The incident occurred while the trailer truck was taking a turn, and the segment slipped and fell directly onto the autorickshaw. Khasim died on the spot due to severe injuries. Fortunately, passengers who were inside the rickshaw stepped out just in time and escaped unhurt.

City Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has assured that the family of the deceased will be compensated as per protocol. Yelahanka traffic police on Thursday said that cases under Sections 281 (rash driving on a public way) and 106 (causing death by negligence) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, were filed based on the complaint lodged by victim's father-in-law, Syed Khader.

Meanwhile local residents have expressed anger over negligence and lack of safety precautions at metro construction sites, demanding stricter oversight and accountability from both contractors and govt agencies. *—Salar News*

BBMP garbage truck driver dies after being beaten by mob

BENGALURU 17 APRIL

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) garbage truck driver Kondayya, 59, succumbed to injuries after he was assaulted by a mob last month in Thanisandra following a road accident he reportedly caused, prompting police to register a case of murder.

On 29 March, a BBMP garbage truck reportedly hit a two-wheeler near Hegdenagar in Thanisandra, under the jurisdiction of the Hennur Traffic Police.

The bike was carrying a father and his 10-year-old son, Iman, who tragically died on the spot.

Enraged by the boy's death, local residents gathered at the scene, set the BBMP truck on fire, and launched a violent attack on the driver.

Kondayya was reportedly beaten with sticks, stones, and bare hands by the mob. He sustained serious injuries in the assault.

Police rushed to the spot, dispersed the crowd and rushed Kondayya to a nearby hospital and later shifted to a private facility for further care where he died.

Three individuals identified as Afroz, Akram Khan, and Tabarak have been arrested in connection with the assault and are currently being interrogated.

Police say efforts are on to identify and apprehend other individuals involved in the mob attack.

Authorities have urged citizens to refrain from taking the law into their own hands and allow legal processes to take their course.

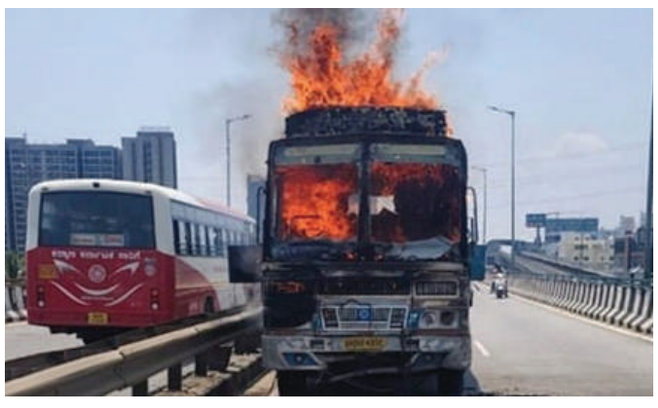
The BBMP officials have yet to issue a formal statement on the incident. *—Salar News*

PROTEST AGAINST BJP

AICC General Secretary and State incharge Randeep Singh Surjewala, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, DCM DK Shivakumar, Shanthinagar MLA NA Haris, AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan, protest against the hike in LPG prices and other essentials at Freedom Park in the City on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Truck catches fire on Tumakuru Road, chokes traffic

BENGALURU 17 APRIL



Vehicular movement came to a standstill on Tumakuru Road for hours on Thursday afternoon after a truck caught fire on the Peenya Flyover, causing massive congestion in the surrounding areas.

As per the police, the incident occurred around 1pm when the truck, heading towards the city, suddenly burst into flames while on the flyover. The driver managed to spot the fire in time and safely jumped out of the vehicle before it was completely engulfed. The cause of the fire was not known immediately.

Following the fire, traffic police temporarily shut down the Flyover in the City-bound direction as a precaution. Commuters heading towards the city were diverted to the service roads below the flyover, leading to long queues and bumper-to-bumper traffic across Peenya, Peenya Industrial Area, and as far as Nagasandra, for over three hours.

City Traffic Police (BTP) issued an advisory urging motorists to avoid the stretch and opt for alternative routes. "Due to a truck fire on Peenya Flyover, traffic towards city has been temporarily diverted to the service road. Commuters are advised to take alternate routes," police said.

Peenya flyover is a crucial link on Tumakuru Road, a major arterial route for both industrial and inter-State traffic. While the fire was brought under control swiftly, the ripple effect of closure led to heavy congestion well into afternoon. Fortunately, no casualties were reported. *—Salar News*

Trucker arrested 3 months after Hebbalkar's crash

BELAGAVI, 17 APRIL

Three months after the car accident involving Minister for Women and Child Development Laxmi Hebbalkar, Belagavi police arrested the truck driver responsible for the hit-and- on run on Thursday.

The accused, 65-year-old Madhukar Kondiram Somavansha, was arrested on Wednesday in Indapur taluk of Pune, Maharashtra. Police also recovered the truck that collided with the Minister's car on 14 January, 2025, along the Pune–Bengaluru National Highway near Ambedgatti village in Kittur taluk.

The Minister and her brother, MLC Channaraj Hattiholi, sustained injuries in the incident while returning from a party meeting in City. Hattiholi recovered within a week, while Hebbalkar was advised a month's bed rest.

According to a complaint lodged by the Minister's driver, the accident occurred when their vehicle was travelling in the middle of three-lane highway the truck attempted to overtake from the left but veered into the centre lane, grazing the car and forcing it off the road, where it crashed into a tree. *—Salar News*

Student forges CET hall ticket; caught by QR app

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

A student attempting to appear as proxy candidate for the Common Entrance Test (CET) was detected, thanks to the State Examinations Authority's (KEA) newly deployed QR code-based facial identification system.

The incident took place at Silver Valley Public PU College examination centre in Malleswaram, during mathematics paper on Thursday. KEA Executive Director H Prasanna said, the accused, Tuba Fatima Jameel, entered the centre using a fabricated hall ticket bearing her photo pasted over the original candidate's details.

The original admission ticket belonged to a student named Tabu Naaz. KEA officials said that discrepancies in exam date entries on the forged document further raised suspicions. *—Salar News*

KOLAR MAN ARRESTED FOR ASSAULT AFTER 27 YRS

KOLAR, 17 APRIL

In a rare breakthrough, Gulpet police have arrested a man who had been evading arrest for 27 years in a neighbourhood dispute turned violent in Kolar's Fort area.

The case dates back to 16 October, 1998, when Nazeer Ahmed filed a complaint against his neighbour, Pyare Jan, accusing him of damaging a portion of his wall, breaking tap connections, and physically assaulting him. Following the complaint, Pyare Jan fled the area, and despite police efforts at the time, he remained untraceable for decades.

Recently, Kolar Superintendent of Police B Nikhil instructed officials to revisit long-pending cases. Acting on these orders, Sub-Inspector Vittal Thalvar directed Constable Manjunath to reopen the 1998 case. Manjunath, familiar with the Fort area and its residents, began tracking leads and discovered that Pyare Jan had migrated to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. Further enquiries revealed he occasionally visited relatives in Rahamathnagar, Kolar.

Using this information, Manjunath tracked Pyare Jan to Palamaner in Andhra Pradesh and apprehended him on Wednesday. The accused claimed he believed the case had been closed due to its age. *—Salar News*

₹50CR BREED

ED raids dog breeder over 'Wolfdog' hoax

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

Satish claimed that the eight -month-old canine, was a mix between a wild wolf and a Caucasian Shepherd **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday raided the JP Nagar residence of S Satish, a self-proclaimed dog breeder who made headlines for buying a rare 'wolfdog' worth Rs 50 crore. The ED has now exposed the claim as a hoax aimed at garnering media attention.

Satish had claimed that the canine, an eight -month-old, 75 kg mix between a wild wolf and a Caucasian Shepherd — named Wolfdog Cadabom Okami — was imported from the US at a cost of Rs 49.7 crore, branding it the most expensive dog in the world.

ED officials, found no evidence of any such transaction.

- Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday raided the JP Nagar residence of S Satish, a self-proclaimed dog breeder who made headlines for buying a rare 'wolfdog' worth Rs 50 crore.

Investigations revealed that Satish had rented exotic-looking dogs from breeders and passed them off as his own in staged videos and interviews.

Satish, who also heads a dog breeders' association, claimed to earn thousands of pounds from showcasing his dogs at private events. He boasted of housing rare breeds on a seven-acre high-security property. ED is now probing Satish for tax evasion, GST violations, and financial misrepresentation.

Officials allege he used social media and press coverage to spread false information for personal gain. *—Salar News*

IIT Hyderabad builds world's first 3D-printed military bunker in Leh

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

With the help of the Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad, a Hyderabad-based deep-tech startup, Simpliforge Creations, has built the world's first on-site 3D-printed bunker in Leh for military use.

Project Prabal envisages military bunkers in different configurations in remote locations at higher altitudes, said Professor KL Subramaniam of IIT-Hyderabad, under whose guidance the project was conceptualised.

"The demonstration project that we did is located in Leh, at an altitude of 11,000 feet above sea level, and we completed the construction under what is called HALO conditions – high altitude and low oxygen," Subramaniam told PTI. They managed to achieve the project in under two weeks, including the tran sportation of the printer to the remote spot.

"The location was highly inhospitable, where we had to function at 40 to 50 per cent oxygen levels. Lack of oxygen meant both man and machine had to perform at lower efficiency levels," said the professor. The team is also behind the world's first 3D-printed temple inside Charvitha Meadows, a gated villa community at Burugupalli in Siddipet, Telangana.

But the military project took several attempts before they could perfect the concrete mix required for high-altitude printing, added Subramaniam.

As it was a defence construction, they were also required to design a specially geometric-patterned façade, which would minimise the ricochet of bullets, said Subramaniam.

"We created undulations on the surface, which, incidentally, is possible only with 3D printing—so that bullets would not bounce off the structure," he added.

Subramaniam said it is now possible to roll out these bunkers in five to six days. *—PTI*

Rahul Gandhi to visit Brown University

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, is set to visit the United States next week. He will be in Rhode Island on 21 and 22 April, where he is scheduled to deliver a talk and engage with faculty and students at Brown University. Congress media and publicity head, Pawan Khera said that Gandhi will speak at the prestigious institution and take part in interactive sessions. Prior to his visit to Brown University, Gandhi will meet with members of the Indian diaspora, including representatives and office bearers of the Indian Overseas Congress. The trip is part of his continued outreach to the global Indian community and academic circles. *—PTI*

MEA: Working with Belgium to extradite Choksi

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

India is actively working with Belgium to extradite fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi, who was arrested in Antwerp on Saturday following a formal request by the Indian government. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed the arrest, stating that it was based on India's extradition request. He added that both countries are cooperating closely to bring Choksi back to India to face trial. Choksi is wanted by Indian investigative agencies in connection with the Rs 13,500-crore Punjab National Bank (PNB) loan fraud case. He had fled India in 2018 and was previously believed to be residing in Antigua and Barbuda, where he obtained citizenship. His arrest in Belgium is seen as a major breakthrough in India's pursuit of economic fugitives. *—PTI*

Jawan held for training accused in grenade attack

CHANDIGARH, 17 APRIL

An Army soldier has been detained by the Punjab Police in connection with a grenade attack on the residence of Jalandhar-based YouTuber Rozer Sandhu last month. Sukhcharan Singh, stationed in Jammu and Kashmir, is accused of providing online training to the alleged assailants on how to throw hand grenades. The attack, which took place on the night of 15-16 March, involved a hand grenade that failed to detonate. Authorities have informed military officials of Singh's involvement. A Jalandhar court has granted a five-day police remand for further investigation. The Pakistani gangster Shahzad Bhatti claimed responsibility for the attack, asserting it was a reaction to Sandhu's derogatory comments about the Muslim community. Seven individuals have been arrested in connection with the incident. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Madras HC asks cops to register FIR against Ponmudy

CHENNAI, 17 APRIL

The Madras High Court on Thursday directed the Tamil Nadu police to file a case against state Forest Minister K Ponmudy, following his recent controversial remarks that cost him his party post. The court cautioned the police that if they do not register an FIR against the DMK leader, it will initiate suomotu (on its own) contempt against them. The judge fixed 23 April as the date for further hearing of the suomotu proceedings. Ponmudy created a controversy recently with his Shaivism-Vaishnavism remarks made in the context of a sex worker at a public meeting. This drew widespread criticism, including from his own party MP Kanimozhi. DMK president and Chief Minister MK Stalin had dismissed Ponmudy, even as the senior leader later tendered an apology for his "inappropriate remarks." *—PTI*

Calcutta HC refuses to ban protests against Waqf

CM Mamata urges Governor Bose not to visit Murshidabad

KOLKATA, 17 APRIL

The Calcutta High Court on Thursday asked the BJP, TMC, and others not to give any provocative speeches about the violence in West Bengal's Murshidabad. However, it refused to ban the protests against the law.

"If the government allows, they will be inviting problems," the Court remarked.

A bench of Justices Soumen Sen and Raja Basu Chowdhury said that no provocative speeches should be made by any side. "Please do not give any provocative speeches. It is not restricted to one person. It covers everyone," the bench said.

The West Bengal government had submitted a report before the court and claimed that the law and order situation was under control. The state government also submitted before the court that adequate steps were taken by the police and administration to quell the violence in the district.

The bench was hearing a petition moved by the Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, who claimed that bomb blasts took place during communal riots and prayed that the National Investigation Agency be handed over the probe into the violence.

Union Minister of State and West Bengal BJP President Sukanta Majumder with party leaders and Murshidabad violence affected people protest in front of the West Bengal Police headquarters, in Kolkata **PHOTO: PTI**

> You (Modi) are against Muslims, but in Saudi Arabia, you meet Muslims... If you go to Dubai, UAE, what hospitality do you take there... You say one thing in your country and another outside
>
> -Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal Chief Minister

Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urged Governor CV Ananda Bose to defer his proposed visit to Murshidabad, stating that the situation was gradually returning to normal and confidence-building measures were underway.

Her appeal comes amid the governor's plans to visit Murshidabad on Friday to take stock of the situation.

"I would request non-locals not to visit Murshidabad right now," Banerjee said. "I would appeal to the governor to wait for a few more days as confidence-building measures are underway. The situation is normalising".

The Chief Minister said she herself decided against visiting the affected areas to avoid triggering political one-upmanship. "I could have gone there, but then others would have also said they would visit. The situation is not conducive now. I will visit the district at an appropriate time," she said.

Governor Bose, however, said he intends to visit the district to make an objective assessment of the ground situation. "I will certainly visit Murshidabad. The situation has been brought under control. I will go to the field to see for myself the realities". *—PTI/Agencies*

STRATEGISE AND PLAN

Cong regroups amid National Herald case

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Congress called a meeting of all its general secretaries, in-charges and heads of frontal organisations on Saturday to decide the way forward in the National Herald case against Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

According to a circular issued by Congress general secretary organisation KC Venugopal, the meeting will be held at 4pm at the Indira Gandhi Bhawan.

The meeting, presided over by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, will deliberate on chalking out its plan for protests and demonstrations against the government over the alleged targeting of the party's top leadership, sources said.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a chargesheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi and others in the National Herald case for allegedly laundering Rs 988 crore.

The BJP maintained the heat on the Gandhi family and asserted that those who indulged in corruption and usurped farmers' land will be put behind bars under the "honest government" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Every paisa will be recovered from them, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said at a press conference at the party headquarters.

Meanwhile, Robert Vadra, husband of Priyanka Gandhi-Varda, appeared before the ED for the third straight day for questioning in a money laundering case. *—PTI*

Congeess party workers stage a protest against the ED over filing of chargesheet against senior leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case, in Thane, Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

CBI books AAP's Pathak, Bhardwaj for foreign donations

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The CBI conducted searches at the premises of former AAP MLA and party's Gujarat polls co-incharge Durgesh Pathak after registering an FIR against him, on Thursday.

The search was conducted for allegedly receiving foreign donations for his party in contravention of FCRA norms, officials said.

Besides Pathak, the agency booked another office bearer of the party Kapil Bhardwaj (now deceased) in the case.

The CBI FIR alleged that receipt of contributions from foreigners by a political party is prohibited under section 3 of the FCRA Act 2010 and section 29B of the Representation of the People Act 1951.

The Home Ministry sent the matter to the CBI on the basis of findings of the ED, which had found that the party had received Rs 1.08 crore of donation from 155 persons residing abroad on 404 occasions using 55 passport numbers.

FIR said, the AAP had set a body "AAP Overseas India" with volunteers to mobilise foreign funds for the party.

"During a fund-raising event organised by MP in Canada in 2016, an e-mail conversation took place between Aniket Saxsena (Coordinator of MP Overseas India) and Kumar Vishwas, (then Convenor of MP Overseas India). This conversation revealed that Pathak and Bhardwaj had asked Aniket to transfer the donation of USD 29,000, directly to Pathak and Bhardwaj through Bhagwant Toor," the FIR alleged.

The ED alleged that there are multiple donors who have used the same passport for donations. *—PTI*

The FIR claims that Durgesh Pathak was illegally receiving funds from foreign sources **PHOTO: X**

Fadnavis says everyone in state should speak Marathi

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has announced that speaking Marathi will be compulsory in the state, aligning with the implementation of the new education policy (NEP).

Fadnavis said, "Everyone has to speak Marathi in Maharashtra,". The announcement stoked discussions on language policy amid reports of violence against non-Marathi speakers.

Concurrently, the Maharashtra government revealed that Hindi will be mandatory as a third language from Classes 1 to 5 in schools, igniting criticism from the Opposition Congress. Leaders argue that enforcing Hindi amounts to an imposition and undermines Marathi pride. Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar expressed concern, saying, "Making it mandatory is like imposing it."

- Fadnavis said that everyone in Maharashtra should speak Marathi. At the same, Hindi has been made the mandatory 3rd language for Class 1-5 students

In related news, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court issued a notice to Fadnavis regarding a petition challenging his 2024 election victory, which was marred by allegations of procedural lapses. The court will hear the case on 8 May, seeking clarity Congress candidate Prafulla Vinodrao Gudadhe's claims. *—PTI*

Farmers to protest against US VP Vance's India visit

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) said on Thursday that it will hold mass demonstrations against US Vice President JD Vance's upcoming visit to India.

In a statement, the AIKS called upon all its units across the country to hold mass demonstrations, burn effigies of the US vice president and raise the "Vance Go Back! India Is Not For Sale" slogan in villages and district headquarters on 21 April, the day he is scheduled to arrive in India.

The farmers' wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) slammed US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick's assertions that India should open its agriculture market in the Bilateral Trade Agreement. "The Bilateral Trade Agreement will be the death-knell of farmers," the AIKS said. *—PTI*

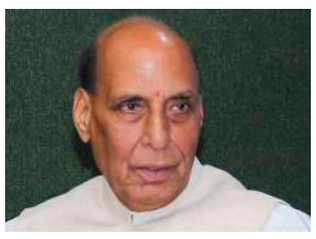
Defence sector to surpass ₹1.6 lakh crore: Rajnath

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has announced that India's defence production for the year is anticipated to surpass Rs 1.60 lakh crore, with a target of Rs 3 lakh crore by 2029. Speaking at the 'Defence Conclave 2025', Singh emphasised that India's enhanced defence capabilities are intended for deterrence rather than conflict.

Singh highlighted the challenges in aero engine manufacturing, pointing to progress under the Kaveri engine project and ongoing collaborations with global companies like Safran, GE, and Rolls Royce. India aims to reduce reliance on imports and create a robust defence industrial ecosystem to bolster both domestic needs and exports, projected to reach Rs 30,000 crore this year and Rs 50,000 crore by 2029.

The Defence Minister lauded the transition of Ordnance Factories into profit-making units, outlining a significant reform in the sector. Notably, the government has released positive indigenisation lists comprising 509 equipment and systems slated for domestic production, alongside a commitment to reserve 75 per cent of the defence budget for procurement from local firms.



Rajnath Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

Singh underscored the rising importance of innovation, particularly among youth and start-ups, through initiatives like iDEX.

Rajnath is set to unveil a statue of Rajput warrior king Maharana Pratap on Friday in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar in Maharashtra. *—PTI*

No place for coalition govt in TN, says AIADMK leader

CHENNAI, 17 APRIL

AIADMK leader, M Thambidurai on Thursday dismissed the possibility of a coalition government in Tamil Nadu, saying that party chief Edappadi K Palaniswami would form a government "alone" in the state after the 2026 Assembly polls, should the alliance win.

The Rajya Sabha MP was responding to queries about a coalition government.

"In 2026 Palaniswami will form the government alone and there is no place for a coalition government. Tamil Nadu has never had got a coalition govt," he said.

The state has never witnessed a coalition government, whether it was under Congress veterans or even Dravidian stalwarts MG Ramachandran and M Karunanidhi. *—PTI*

Andhra issues ordinance on SC sub-categorisation

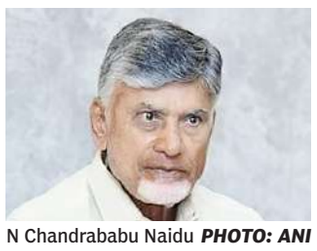
AMARAVATI, 17 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh on Thursday issued an ordinance on sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SC) classifying them into three groups in government jobs and education in the state.

"The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Sub-classification) Ordinance, 2025 will be published in the Andhra Pradesh Gazette in English, Telugu and Urdu Languages as Andhra Pradesh Ordinance No. 2 of 2025," a Law Department Order said.

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, on 15 April, approved an ordinance proposal to sub-categorise SCs into three groups with varying percentages of reservations in the total 15 per cent.

Aimed at uplifting SCs, 59 castes have been divided into three groups. As many as 12 castes, such as Chandala, Paki, Relli, Dome and other castes, are in Group-I, with one per cent reservation, the state government had earlier said. With a reservation of 6.5 per cent, Group – II includes the castes of Chamar, Madiga, Sindhola, Matangi and others, while Group – III with 7.5 per cent includes Mala and its subcastes, along with Adhi Andhra, Panchama and others. *—PTI*



N Chandrababu Naidu **PHOTO: ANI**

- 59 castes have been divided into three groups. Group 1 will get one per cent reservation, Group 2 will get 6.5 per cent reservation and Group 3 are set to get 7.5 per cent

REKINDLED SPIRIT?

UBT uses AI to channel Bal Thackeray

NASHIK, 17 APRIL

The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to recreate Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray's voice to deliver a speech. The move was an effort to shore up the party's prospects after the assembly polls debacle.

While the speech attacked the BJP and the present Shiv Sena under Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, state BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule called it a "childish stunt".

The nearly 13-minute speech, with a booming voice resembling that of Bal Thackeray, began with his trademark opening line "Jamlelya majhya tamam Hindu bandhavanu, baghinino ani matano" (greetings to my Hindu brothers, sisters and mothers who have gathered here).

It was relayed at a Sena (UBT) gathering in Nashik in north Maharashtra.

The speech tried to recreate, according to the Sena (UBT), what Bal Thackeray would have said had he been alive. The AI speech tried to capture the mannerisms and tone of Bal Thackeray, a revered orator. However, it sounded more akin Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray's attacks on the BJP.

This is the first time the Sena founder's speech was used by his son's party to train guns on its opponents. The move comes when the Sena (UBT) is being mocked by its opponents with old videos of Bal Thackeray castigating the Congress.

State BJP chief Bawankule condemned AI play by Sena (UBT).

In a post on X, Bawankule called it a "childish stunt".

"Disgrace! When no one is listening to their voice, only a group like UBT could resort to the childish act of making their points heard in the voice of revered Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray," Bawankule said, alleging that the UBT is using Bal Thackeray's recreated voice in stances against his ideologies.

It remains to be seen if Shiv Sena (UBT) will artificially resurrect their supremo again. *—PTI*

To boost morale, Shiv Sena (UBT) used an AI recreation of late leader Bal Thackeray's voice to deliver a speech **PHOTO: ANI**

- Bal Thackeray's voice began the speech with his trademark opening line, 'greetings to my Hindu brothers, sisters and mothers who have gathered here.' SHiv Sena (UBT) used his voice to deliver attacks against the Shiv Sena and the BJP

SC mulls panel for 'deeper' probe into sports bodies

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Thursday hinted at appointing an inquiry commission for a "deeper probe" into sports associations' affairs. It said apart from sporting activities "all kinds of things are happening" in them. "We are inclined to appoint a commission of inquiry for a deeper probe into the affairs of Kabaddi associations because other than sports activities all kinds of things are happening in these bodies. We also intend to then expand the scope of commission of inquiry to other sports associations," a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh said, hearing a plea of two national Kabaddi players. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Art historian Alka Pande honoured with French award

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

French Ambassador Thierry Mathou has awarded art historian and curator Alka Pande the title of Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, recognising her exceptional contributions to the arts and her commitment to showcasing India's diverse artistic heritage on an international platform. Mathou highlighted Pande's role in fostering cultural dialogue between France and India, stating her work has enhanced mutual understanding and enriched both nations' cultural landscapes. "This award imbues me with added confidence, strength and purpose for my single-minded quest of pursuing the study of Indian visual arts through the contemporary lens," Pade said. The ceremony took place at the Alliance Française de Delhi. The event concluded with the launch of her book, 'The Kama Quartet'. *—PTI*

Man in UP held for molesting Lithuanian tourist

AGRA, 17 APRIL

A man from Haryana has been arrested for allegedly molesting a Lithuanian tourist at Agra Fort. Identified as Mizan from Mewat, he is accused of inappropriately touching the woman while she was visiting the historic site on Wednesday. Following the incident, a complaint was filed at the Tourism police station. Assistant Commissioner of Police (Taj Security), Syed Arib Ahmed, confirmed that a case has been registered under Section 75(2) (sexual harassment) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). He stated that Mizan was apprehended after a thorough review of CCTV footage and further inquiries. Mizan was presented before a court on Thursday, with legal proceedings continuing. Authorities said they are committed to ensuring the safety of tourists. *—PTI*

JNU prof sacked for molesting foreign researcher

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

A senior faculty member at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been dismissed following allegations of sexual harassment involving a Japanese researcher. The incident reportedly occurred during a university event a few months ago. University sources confirmed that this dismissal is not an isolated incident, with multiple complaints against the professor noted in the past. The decision was made by the Executive Council after a thorough internal inquiry established the credibility of the allegations. The researcher filed a formal complaint upon returning to Japan, which was subsequently communicated to the Indian Embassy and the Ministry of External Affairs. In related news, another faculty member was dismissed for corruption linked to a research project. The case has been referred to the CBI. *—PTI*

'Untainted' WB teachers dissatisfied with SC order

Call it a short term relief, ask what they will do after 31 Dec

KOLKATA, 17 APRIL

Members of ABTA, DIFY, SFI and other organisations during a protest against the West Bengal government over teachers recruitment scam, in Kolkata *PHOTO: PTI*

In major relief to West Bengal, the Supreme Court on Thursday extended the services of terminated teachers found untainted by the CBI.

However, the teachers expressed dissatisfaction over the "short-term relief."

Dhritish Mondal of Jogyo Sikshak Manch (Eligible Teachers' Platform) echoed the sentiment, saying, "We are not tainted candidates. This is even acknowledged in the SC order. Then why should our services be extended only till 31 December? As per service rules, we should serve till we reach the superannuation age of 60. If the WBSSC knows who is tainted and who is not, why can't they tell the SC clearly?"

Mondal, one of the nearly 26,000 teaching and non-teaching staff whose appointments through the 2016 SSC recruitment drive were annulled, emphasised that the teachers, who had qualified through the process were unwilling to sit for fresh exams. "This short-term extension means little after all our hard work and years of service."

While 70 members of the Manch launched a sit-in protest in Delhi on 16 April, over 100 others have been staging an indefinite demonstration at Esplanade in Kolkata since 3 April.

Asked whether the teachers would resume classes from Saturday, the protesters said, "We will decide soon. If we do return to school, it will be solely in the interest of the students, who are suffering."

Pankaj Roy, a political science teacher, told PTI, "The SC order doesn't even address the case of non-teaching candidates. This omission, in our view, results from the state government and SSC's attempt to create division among protesting sacked staff".

A member of the managing committee of Bishnupur High School in Bankura district said the institution faced serious academic disruptions after the dismissal of eight teachers. "With today's development, we are trying to reach out to the affected teachers and request them to resume classes from Saturday," the member said. *—PTI*

Vincy Aloshious claims Tom Chacko used drugs

T'PURAM, 17 APRIL

Malayalam film actor Vincy Aloshious has announced that she will not file a police complaint regarding a co-actor's alleged drug use on the set of an upcoming film. In a recent television interview, Aloshious expressed her willingness to share her experience and cooperate with authorities if contacted during any investigation.

The actor has, however, lodged complaints with both the Kerala Film Chamber and the Association of Malayalam Movie Artistes (AMMA), urging appropriate action. Aloshious described an incident in which her co-actor, Shine Tom Chacko, made sexually explicit comments and exhibited inappropriate behaviour towards her and a fellow actress while reportedly under the influence of drugs.

Despite the discomfort caused by the incident, Aloshious chose not to escalate the matter legally, stating, "I did not press the complaint as the film should not be wound up half-way." She reaffirmed her complaint was against Chacko, not the film itself.

Chacko has not publicly commented yet, but he has a controversial history with drug-related allegations. Chacko had reportedly fled from a hotel during a an anti-drug raid.

Police have said that they will take him for questioning soon.

Aloshious recently won the Kerala government's best actress award for her role in 'Rekha.' *—PTI*

DEMAND JUSTICE

Candidates on the Women Civil Police Officer rank list protest demanding their appointment, outside the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, on Thursday. They have been protesting for 16 days *PHOTO: PTI*

HC: Protection not a right for those who wed against parent's wishes

PRAYAGRAJ, 17 APRIL

Couples who marry against the wishes of their parents cannot claim police protection as a right unless there is a real threat to their life and liberty The Allahabad High Court said.

It said the court can provide security to a couple in a deserving case but in the absence of any threat perception, such a couple must "learn to support each other and face the society".

Justice Saurabh Srivastava made this observation while hearing a writ petition filed by Shreya Kesarwani and her husband seeking police protection and a direction for the private respondents not to interfere in their peaceful marital life.

In its decision dated 4 April

the court disposed of their petition, noting that there was no serious threat perception to the petitioners.

"There is no requirement of passing any order for providing police protection to them. Courts are not meant to provide protection to such youths who have simply fled to marry according to their own wishes," the court observed.

"There is not even an iota of evidence to evince that private respondents (relatives of either of the petitioners) are likely to cause physical or mental assault to the petitioners," the court added.

In addition, the court noted that the petitioners had not submitted a specific application in the form of any FIR against the alleged illegal conduct of the private respondents.

However, noting that the petitioners had already submitted a representation to the superintendent of police, Chitrakoot district, the court said,

"In case the concerned police find a real threat perception, they will do the needful in accordance with law," the court said. *—PTI*

EaseMyTrip says nothing was seized during ED raids

NEW DELHI/RAIPUR 17 APRIL

Travel booking platform EaseMyTrip on Thursday denied any association with the Mahadev betting app, a day after the ED searched the premises of its co-founder Nishant Pitti. In a regulatory filing, the company stated that no seizure was made from the search.

In a statement, an EaseMyTrip said, "The ED conducted searches at over 50 locations of various persons/corporates. Amongst them one was EaseMyTrip premises. While EaseMyTrip has no direct or indirect association with the Mahadev betting app or any other betting platform, we remain fully committed to cooperating with authorities". *—PTI*

UP: Woman kills husband with lover's help, blame snakebite

MEERUT, 17 APRIL

- Ravita and her lover Amardeep strangled her husband Amit after he found about the affair. After committing the crime, they placed a snake near the body to pass it as a snake bite

A man was murdered by his wife and her lover in Uttar Pradesh, who then tried to disguise the crime by placing a venomous snake near his body, police said on Thursday.

The victim, Amit Kashyap, 30, was discovered dead in his home on Sunday morning, with a snake positioned beside him, leading initial investigators to suspect a snakebite as the cause of death. However, the post-mortem revealed that he had actually been strangled.

Following the revelation, Circle Officer Abhishek Kumar Patel confirmed that the accused, Ravita, 30, and her lover Amardeep, 20, both from Akbarpur Sadat, confessed to the murder during questioning. They admitted to strangling Amit before placing the snake near his body to create the illusion of an accident.

Police said that Amit had confronted Ravita about her affair with Amardeep, which resulted in frequent arguments between the couple. The two are now in custody. *—PTI*

'LIFELONG BOND'

Woman surrenders after eloping with son-in-law

ALIGARH, 17 APRIL

A dramatic 10-day saga that captivated social media and shocked an entire village has concluded after a 39-year-old woman, Sapna Devi, surrendered with her would-be son-in-law, Rahul, 25, at in Aligarh district.

Sapna's elopement days before her daughter's wedding to Rahul triggered widespread outrage, leading to frantic searches by her family, who later discovered that the groom-to-be had also gone missing. "It is not a short-term liaison. It's a lifelong relationship," Sapna said upon surrendering.

Rahul explained that his actions were driven by concern for Sapna, who he claimed was facing harassment from her family, leading her to consider suicide. Their relationship reportedly developed through secret communications via a mobile phone gifted to Rahul by Sapna's family.

Sapna, 38, with Rahul, 25. The two began their affair through secret conversations with a mobile gifted to Rahul by Sapna's family *PHOTO: X*

- 39-year-old Sapna eloped with Rahul, 25, just days before he was set to marry her daughter. The two had crossed into Nepal before deciding to return

The couple travelled to Sitamarhi in Bihar, then crossed into Nepal before deciding to return and surrender as pressure mounted.

Meanwhile, Sapna's husband, Jitendra, alongside their daughter and her brother, demanded the return of jewellery and cash allegedly taken by Sapna. She vehemently denied the allegation, calling the claims "completely concocted." *—PTI*

MATTER OF FAITH

SC to see if Muslims can use succession law, not Shariat

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to examine whether Muslims can be governed by succession law to deal with ancestral properties instead of the Shariat without leaving his religion.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of a plea filed by Naushad KK and issued notices to the Centre and the Kerala government and asked them to file their responses.

The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, deals with marriage, succession, inheritance and charities among Muslims.

Last year, the bench agreed to consider a plea of Safiya PM, that she is a non-believer Muslim woman and wanted to deal with her ancestral properties under the succession laws instead of the Shariat.

Another similar plea filed in 2016 by Quran Sunnat Society' is also pending. The bench will hear the three petitions together. *—PTI*

Report on Biren's audio clips ready: Centre tells SC

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The Centre informed the Supreme Court on Thursday that a forensic report on the authenticity of leaked audio clips alleging the complicity of former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh in the state's ethnic violence was ready and would be filed shortly in a sealed cover.

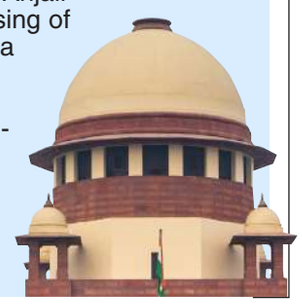
A bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna took note of the submissions and deferred the hearing on a plea filed by the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR) in the week commencing 5 May.

"The state is gradually limping back to normalcy and we will keep it (the matter) on hold at the moment," CJI Khanna had said. *—PTI*

SC gives EC 3 weeks to respond to pleas against voter amendment

New Delhi, 17 April

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted three weeks to the Election Commission to respond to the pleas against the recent amendments to the 1961 election rules. The pleas were filed by Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, Shyam Lal Pal and activist Anjali Bhardwaj. A bench comprising of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar sought the response. The pleas pertain to the amendment which bars access to CCTV footage. The pleas claim that the amendment erodes the integrity of the electoral process. *—PTI*



Potter earning ₹95,000 yearly gets IT notice for ₹13cr deal

KOTA, 17 APRIL

A potter in Rajasthan with an annual income of only Rs 95,000 was left utterly dumbfounded after he received two back-to-back income tax notices last month for business transactions worth Rs 13.55 crore in the 2020-2021 fiscal.

It was later revealed that Vishnu Kumar Prajapat, 32, a resident of Jhaliji Ka Barana in Bundi district, had possibly been a victim of identity theft.

Prajapat received the first notice on 11 March through email and speed post, saying no IT return was filed for the transaction of over Rs 10.61 crore in FY 2020-21. He was directed to file a reply by 19 March. He immediately rushed to the local police station. They referred him to the cyber police station in Bundi but nobody there listened to his complaint, Prajapat claimed.

The potter then took the help of a chartered accountant who discovered that his Aadhaar, PAN and other document details were "misused" for GST registration of a Mumbai-based firm owned by an individual.

Prajapat visited the office of Bundi superintendent of police, where ASP Uma Sharma finally took his complaint and sent it to the cyber police on 23 March.

- On 11 March, Prajapat received a notice saying no IT return was filed for the transaction of over Rs 10.61. Then, on 30 March, he received a notice for a transaction of Rs 2.83 crore

On 30 March, Prajapat received another IT notice this time for a financial transaction of Rs 2.83 crore.

The potter, a graduate in Arts, told PTI that he earns only around Rs 95,000 each year by selling clay pots, his paternal business.

Police however denied charges of delay in initiating a probe into the matter *—PTI*

HOLY WEEK IN OLD JERUSALEM

Catholic clergy hold candles as they walk during the Washing of the Feet procession at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where many Christians believe Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead, in the Old City of Jerusalem. Holy week celebrates the seven days — Palm Sunday, Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, Holy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, leading to Easter ***PHOTO: PTI***

Amid rapid deforestation, India counts its trees

India aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070, and trees have an essential part to play in controlling carbon emissions in the world's most populous country ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Trees are essential allies in the fight against desertification, pollution and climate change — and Delhi is currently conducting a massive tree census.

India's Forest Research Institute is organising a count of all trees across Delhi, India's capital territory containing the city of New Delhi, amid a controversy about illegal tree felling. The decision to launch the census was recently confirmed by India's Supreme Court, with the judges instructing the institute to work towards increasing the city's green cover.

The project has been given a timeline of around four years and an estimated budget of around 44.3 million Indian rupees. In that time, the tree census takers are expected to do more than just count the trees in the territory.

Experts and volunteers should also sort the trees into species, record their height, girth, health status and exact location. Most importantly for climate scientists, they are to record the so-called carbon mass of the tree — the carbon absorbed from the atmosphere through photosynthesis.

"One tree per person"

India aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070, and trees have an essential part to play in controlling carbon emissions in the world's most populous country. But there are other reasons to fight deforestation — a 2019 study by the Indian space agency ISRO reported that some 30 per cent of India's territory is at risk of desertification, and having more trees, especially in the cities, can curb the effects of pollution and heat-related deaths.

Plant scientist Dr. Smitha Hegde believes that "at least one tree per person" is needed to achieve net zero on carbon emissions. Hegde made the claim during an interview with content creator Q Head on YouTube, where she also discussed her 2023 tree census in the port city of Mangalore. She and her team of 40 volunteers only found some 19,000 trees in public spaces of Mangalore, which has a population of around 600,000.

Notably, it took one full year to complete the census in a city many times smaller than New Delhi.

AI technology and drones to fill in for humans. Most measuring and counting are still done manually in India, with the data sorted into Excel sheets.

At the same time, the census takers have started incorporating modern technologies such as remote sensing, LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), drones, and GIS (Geographic Information Systems), improving both the accuracy of data and the speed of the process.

In the online interview, Hegde acknowledged that modern technology can make surveying trees much easier and faster. However, a fully automated system for this process has not yet been developed.

Talking to DW, AI scientist Arpit Yadav said improving technological infrastructure would require a "really huge investment."

"AI technology uses methods of computer vision and object detection. When drones fly over forests or any area, they use object detection to identify trees and count them. This data is then sent to a server, which makes the counting process faster and more accurate," he said.

"The better technological infrastructure we build, the less there will be a need for field visits," Yadav added, but noted that "if we do not have enough drones and advanced technology to minimize the errors, human involvement will remain high."

In addition to traditional and AI-based methods, many countries also use satellite technologies to count trees. In this process, satellites take photos and send out radio waves or microwave signals, which bounce off the Earth's surface and provide various types of data.But even space-age technology has its limits.

"Satellites cannot tell whether grazing is happening in an area or not. For that, field visits are necessary," Purabi Saikia, a professor at Banaras Hindu University and a forest ecologist who has worked on forest mapping and assessment in several Indian states, told DW.

Local communities as allies in fight to protect trees. Tree censuses make it easier to track invasive species and protect the trees from illegal logging. In this battle, conservationists can call on allies from local communities, especially those whose lifestyles depend on trees. Some people in India still consider certain trees to be sacred, while others simply recognize their medicinal value.

"Those who are more dependent on forests tend to use them more responsibly, while those who are less dependent often cause more harm," Saikia told DW. *—DW News*

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Musk puts his top aides at federal agency to gain profit

On the rooftop patio of the General Services Administration headquarters, an agency staffer recently discovered something strange: a rectangular device attached to a wire that snaked across the roof, over the ledge and into the administrator's window one floor below.

It didn't take long for the employee — an IT specialist — to figure out the device was a transceiver that communicates with Elon Musk's vast and private Starlink satellite network. Concerned that the equipment violated federal laws designed to protect public data, staffers reported the discovery to superiors and the agency's internal watchdog.

The Starlink equipment raises a host of questions about what Musk and his efficiency czars are doing at GSA, an obscure agency that is playing an outsized role in the Trump administration's quest to slash costs and bring the federal government to heel.

Among other clues that GSA is a critical cog in Musk's stated efforts to slash billions of dollars in federal spending: people with ties to the entrepreneur or his companies hold key jobs at the agency.

Its acting administrator is a Silicon Valley tech executive with expertise in rolling out artificial intelligence tools and a wife who once worked for Musk at his social media company, X.

An engineer at Tesla, the billionaire's electric car company, runs the GSA's technology division. And one of Musk's trusted lieutenants is helping to spearhead the work of downsizing the government's real estate footprint.

GSA oversees many of Uncle Sam's real estate transactions, collecting and paying rent on behalf of almost every federal agency.

It helps manage billions in federal contracts. And it assists other agencies in building better websites and digital tools for citizens.

It is so important because it is "a choke point for all agencies," said Steven Schooner, a George Washington University law school professor who specializes in government contracting. "They can, in effect, stop all civilian agencies from purchasing, period. That's everything."

In a statement in early March, GSA said it planned to get rid of "non-core assets" and welcomed "creative solutions, including sale-lease backs, ground leases and other forms of public/private partnerships."

The search for those cuts has engulfed the entire 12,000-person agency. At the helm of that push is the GSA's acting administrator, Stephen Ehikian, the tech executive whose wife worked for X.

"GSA was built for this moment," Ehikian told employees last month in a meeting, a video of which was viewed by The Associated Press.

"This agency is the backbone of federal government operations," said Ehikian, who is seeking to expand automation — through the use of artificial intelligence — of many GSA functions. "We literally have an impact on the administration's mandate right now, which is around efficiency."

Another close Musk adviser — Nicole Hollander — is driving the initiative to unload the government's real estate. Her husband, Steve Davis, is acting as the de facto leader of the Musk-inspired Department of Government Efficiency.

Hollander, who studied business and real estate at George Washington University, is a licensed property manager in Washington, according to LinkedIn. Her profile also lists her as an employee of X since 2023.

In early March, the GSA real estate division released a list of hundreds of government-owned or leased properties it sought to sell in a frenzied rush.

The list drew sharp criticism from Democrats and civil society groups because it proposed the sale of the Justice Department headquarters and included at least one undisclosed Central Intelligence Agency facility. GSA quickly withdrew the list.

That did not stall DOGE's fire sale. In the presentation viewed by the AP, Ehikian said the agency has cancelled more than 680 leases, listed or sold at least 32 properties worth USD 185 million and cut more than USD 50 billion in contracts.

Hollander has mostly operated behind the scenes. She rarely appears in Zoom meetings, according to employees.

Documents obtained by the AP show spreadsheets she creates are stripped of her name and replaced with a more generic "GSA leadership."

The AP also obtained copies of some event invitations on Hollander's calendar. They showed Hollander had several meetings with commercial real estate and services firms, including a brokerage firm and a real estate consulting company that helps companies economize their space. *—PTI*

General Services Administration headquarters staf recently discovered a transceiver that communicates with Elon Musk's Starlink satellite network snaked across the roof ***PHOTO: PTI***

Concern rises amid death of 5 top Chinese AI scientists in recent yrs

Five top Chinese AI scientists have died prematurely in recent years succumbing to heavy work pressure as China is locked in a tech war with the US in the Artificial Intelligence field, a media report said on Tuesday.

China was abuzz this year with DeepSeek, the latest AI offering that drew global attention for its low-cost model. Further, DeepSeek's R1 used a fraction of compute power as compared to established AI models like ChatGPT. Also, DeepSeek overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's Appstore, as the US tech industry - that has long justified injecting billions of dollars into AI investments — watched in sheer disbelief.

But while China has a growing AI talent pool and homegrown success stories, the country has also lost some of its leading figures in the crucial sector, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. The early deaths of these experts – due to accidents or illness – have raised concerns about the personal safety of those in the industry and the stressful research environment they face, the report said.

Significantly, many of them studied in the US and returned to work in China.

Chinese computer scientist Liu Shaoshan said that while AI researchers might earn huge salaries, they were also under intense pressure. "The industry is developing too fast and the competition is very fierce," Liu told the Post, adding that by the time one researcher came up with an idea and made it halfway through an experiment, someone else might have already published on the same topic.

Liu added that practitioners also faced ethical pressures. "AI can also have a big impact on society as its use spreads, and this unknown potential for a huge change in society can also put them under very high moral pressure," the Post quoted Liu as saying.

The report also compiled a list of top AI scientists who died – between 2022 and 2025 – at a relatively young age. Most of them were in their scientific prime and had made discoveries in key areas such as computer vision, military artificial intelligence and medical AI, it said.

In June 2022, Sun Jian, chief scientist at Beijing-based AI company Megvii Technology, died of sudden illness at the age of 45. Megvii is involved in developing image recognition and deep learning software. Sun was a renowned figure in the field of AI and computer vision. A former Microsoft researcher with years of expertise in computer vision and computational photography, Sun returned to China from the US and joined startup Megvii in 2016 as chief scientist and managing director of research.

Sun was named in the MIT Technology Review's 'Innovators under 35' list in 2010. He also had 35 US patents to his name, 13 of which were registered internationally.

In July 2023, Feng Yanghe, 38, an expert on artificial intelligence for China's defence sector, died in Beijing on his way to a "major mission" at the age of 38, according to an obituary.

Chinese computer scientist Liu Shaoshan said that while AI researchers might earn huge salaries, they were also under intense pressure ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

Feng – whose research focused on war games, reinforcement learning and intelligent planning – was an associate professor at the National University of Defence Technology (NUDT) in central China's Changsha, the report said.

One of the driving forces behind the AI software used in the country's military simulations, he led teams that developed the War Skull I and War Skull II AI systems used by the People's Liberation Army to simulate military war games for joint operations.

Before joining NUDT, Feng studied statistics at Harvard University and high-performance computing at the University of Iowa as part of a joint training programme from 2011 to 2013.

Also in 2023, AI expert Tang Xiaoou, a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and founder of tech firm SenseTime, died at the age of 55. According to his company's obituary, Tang died after succumbing to an illness, the nature of which was not disclosed.

Tang received his bachelor's degree from the University of Science and Technology of China in Anhui province in 1990 before moving to the US for graduate studies. He received his master's degree from the University of Rochester in 1991 and his doctorate from MIT in 1996.

Tang, whose research interests included computer vision, pattern recognition and video processing, promoted the industrialisation of AI vision technology in China.

He Zhi, co-founder and chief innovation officer of AI-driven healthcare company Yidu Tech, died in 2024 at the age of 41.

He was an "outstanding pathfinder" who led the digitalisation of the healthcare industry, according to an obituary posted on social media.

It said he suffered respiratory and cardiac arrest due to altitude sickness while in Qinghai, an inland province in northwest China, according to the report. He died in April last year after an unsuccessful attempt to save his life, according to the obituary.

His company described him as "an outstanding, consistent entrepreneur in artificial intelligence and big data who devoted all his energy to computer science and life science research".

Also Quan Yuhui, a computer image processing expert and associate professor at the School of Computer Science and Engineering at South China University of Technology (SCUT) in south China's Guangdong province, died of illness on January 14 this year at the age of 39, according to a university obituary. "We have lost a great young talent," the obituary stated.

He was included on Stanford University's "World's top 2 per cent scientists" list in 2024, the Post reported. *—PTI*

US launches airstrikes on 50 Houthi targets

DUBAI, 17 APRIL

A series of intense suspected US airstrikes struck 50 Houthi-controlled sites across Yemen into Thursday morning, resulting in at least one reported fatality in the capital, Sana'a. The strikes occurred in various governorates overnight, although the Houthis disclosed little information regarding the specific locations targeted. The US military's Central Command has also refrained from providing detailed information about the operations, which have been ongoing since 15 March. US forces are conducting these strikes from the USS Harry S. Truman in the Red Sea and the USS Carl Vinson in the Arabian Sea.
—PTI

N Korea threatens retaliation over US bomber flights

SEOUL, 17 APRIL

North Korea has issued a warning of unspecified retaliation following the recent deployment of US long-range bombers over South Korea. The B-1B bombers participated in an aerial drill on Tuesday with US and South Korean fighter jets, which the South Korean Defence Ministry stated aimed to demonstrate their combined deterrence against North Korea's advancing nuclear programme. North Korea condemned the joint military exercise as a serious provocation, heightening regional tensions. An unidentified spokesperson for the North's Defence Ministry labelled the US's actions as a direct threat to its security, pledging to counter what it describes as US aggression with "powerful force." As tensions rise, North Korea continues its missile tests to modernise its nuclear arsenal and has been accused of supplying arms and troops to support Russia's war in Ukraine.
—PTI

PHOTO: X

Ex-OneRepublic bassist challenges Cali GOP member

LOS ANGELES, 17 APRIL

In a bid to reclaim control of the US House, Democrats are enlisting pop-rock star Tim Myers, former bassist for OneRepublic, to challenge long-serving Republican Rep. Ken Calvert in California's 41st District. The district, which stretches from Los Angeles suburbs to Palm Springs, is seen as a key opportunity for the party. Myers, a Grammy-nominated artist, criticises Calvert's three decades in office as indicative of a failing status quo. "It's time for a change," he says, highlighting issues like rising consumer prices and wildfires. Calvert, the longest-serving Republican in California's congressional history, holds a slim registration advantage. Despite a challenging political landscape, Democrats are targeting Calvert's seat as they strive to counter the Trump administration.*—PTI*

Pope Francis recovers as Vatican prepares for Easter

VATICAN CITY, 17 APRIL

The Vatican commenced the solemn observances of Holy Week on Thursday, with Pope Francis, 88, taking a step back due to ongoing recovery following a severe bout of double pneumonia. While the Pope has delegated key liturgical events to selected cardinals, he is expected to make a few appearances, having already surprised attendees during Palm Sunday Mass. In recent days, Francis has visited St. Peter's Basilica and St. Mary Major basilica to pray. He expressed gratitude to the medical staff who treated him during his hospital stay, acknowledging their efforts despite lingering health challenges. Cardinals are now presiding over major services, including the Holy Thursday Mass.
—PTI

Pak's Army Chief describes Kashmir as 'jugular vein'

He defends 2-nation theory saying Hindus & Muslims are different

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Army Chief General Asim Munir described Kashmir as Pakistan's "jugular vein" during a diaspora event, where he asked overseas Pakistanis to pass on the country's story to their children, emphasising that their forefathers believed Hindus and Muslims were different in every possible aspect of life.

He has also defended the two-nation theory that was the basis for the Partition in 1947.

Referring to the Balochistan separatist movements, Munir expressed resolve that the nation's army would crackdown on the movements deal a decisive blow towards it.

Addressing a gathering of Pakistanis based abroad in what seemed an effort whip nationalist sentiments, General Munir said they were the country's ambassadors and must not forget that they belong to a "superior ideology and culture". "You should definitely tell Pakistan's story to your children. Our forefathers thought that we are different from the Hindus in every aspect of life. Our religions, our customs, traditions, thoughts and ambitions are different. That was the foundation of the two-nation theory that was laid."

Stressing his point, General Munir said India and Pakistan are two nations. "We are not one nation. That is why our forefathers struggled to create this country. Our forefathers and we have sacrificed a lot for the creation of this country. We know how to defend it,"he said.

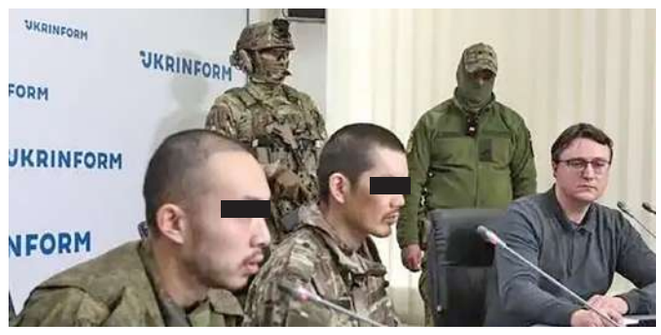
Voicing fears that Pakistan would not be able to bring in investment due to terrorist activity, General Munir said, "Do you think terrorists can take away the destiny of the country? The 1.3 million-strong Indian Army, with all its wherewithal, if they cannot intimidate us, do you think these terrorists can subdue the armed forces of Pakistan?" he said.

The Pakistan Army chief also made it clear that the armed forces will crack down hard on the separatist movements in Balochistan. Speaking about Kashmir, General Munir said, "Our stance is absolutely clear, it was our jugular vein, it will be our jugular vein, we will not forget it. We will not leave our Kashmiri brothers in their heroic struggle."

His remarks are bound to intensify hostility between India and Pakistan even as possibility of talks seem dimming. *—Agencies*

Border Security Force (BSF) personnel patrol along the India-Pakistan border *PHOTO: PTI*

> **You should definitely tell Pakistan's story to your children. Our forefathers thought that we are different from the Hindus in every aspect of life. Our religions, our customs, traditions, thoughts and ambitions are different. That was the foundation of the two-nation theory that was laid**
>
> - General Asim Munir, Pakistan Army Chief



The soldiers were captured in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region with identification documents *PHOTO: UA*

Ukraine parades Chinese men captured fighting war

KYIV, 17 APRIL

Russian forces launched a massive drone attack on Dnipro, even as Ukraine, released a footage of Chinese captives speaking in mandarin and apparently describing the recent battle. China has all along refuted that Chinese were recruited as soldiers in the war.

In a statement on social media platform X, Zelenskyy said the soldiers were captured in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region with identification documents, including bank cards which had "personal data" on them.

Ukraine's forces fought six Chinese soldiers and took two of them prisoner, he said.

The post was accompanied by a video showing one of the alleged Chinese captives in handcuffs, speaking Mandarin Chinese and apparently describing a recent battle.

"We have information suggesting that there are many more Chinese citizens in the occupier's units than just these two," he said.

"Russia's involvement of China, along with other countries, whether directly or indirectly, in this war in Europe is a clear signal that Putin intends to do anything but end the war," Zelensky added. Russian forces meanwhile launched a massive drone attack on the southeastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro, killing three people including a child and wounding dozens causing widespread damage to civilian infrastructure, officials said Thursday.

In reaction to the Dnipro attack, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged allies to support the country with air defense weapons.

Meanwhile, a Ukrainian delegation was in Paris for a round of bilateral and multilateral meetings with representatives of countries from the "coalition of the willing," including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, said Andrii Yermak, head of the Presidential Office. The multinational force is expected to act as a long-term security guarantee aimed at deterring future Russian aggression after a ceasefire is in place. *—PTI*

US threatens Harvard with student ban

According to university data, 6,793 international students attend Harvard, 27.2% of its enrolment in the 2024-25 academic year *PHOTO: X*

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

The Trump administration escalated its stand-off with Harvard, with the US Department of Homeland Security threatening to revoke Harvard University's ability to enrol foreign students if it failed to provide by April 30 records on its international student visa holders' "illegal and violent" activities. It also cancelled grants totalling more than USD 2.7 million to Harvard University.

According to university data, 6,793 international students attend Harvard, 27.2% of its enrolment in the 2024-25 academic year.

"Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem announced the cancellation of two DHS grants totaling over $2.7 million to Harvard University, declaring it unfit to be entrusted with taxpayer dollars," the DHS said in a statement on Wednesday.

Accusing the varsity management driven by 'spineless leadership' and of bending the knee to antisemitism, Noem has written a letter, "With anti-American, pro-Hamas ideology poisoning its campus and classrooms, Harvard's position as a top institution of higher learning is a distant memory. America demands more from universities entrusted with taxpayer dollars." he said

The latest action from the Trump administration against Harvard comes on the heels of a USD 2.2 billion federal funding freeze because the university rejected a list of demands. The administration also proposed the revocation of the university's tax-exempt status over its radical ideology. *—PTI*

IRAN-US NUKE TALKS TO BE IN ROME

DUBAI, 17 APRIL

Iran confirmed Wednesday that the next round of nuclear talks with the United States this weekend will be held in Rome after earlier confusion over where the negotiations would be held.

The announcement by Iranian state television came as Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian formally approved the resignation of one of his vice presidents who served as Tehran's key negotiator in its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency, also arrived in the Islamic Republic on Wednesday. His talks may include negotiations over just what access the IAEA inspectors can get under any proposed deal.

Any possible deal between Iran and the US likely would need to rely on the IAEA's expertise to ensure Tehran's compliance. And despite tensions between Iran and the agency, its access has not been entirely revoked. *—PTI*

Any possible deal between Iran and the US likely would need to rely on the IAEA's expertise *PHOTO: X*

Autism is a preventable disease: RFK Jr

In remarks that pathologises neurodivergence, Health secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr said on Wednesday that children in the U.S. are being diagnosed with autism at an "alarming rate," and called it a 'preventable disease' promising to conduct studies to identify the causes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had released a report that found an estimated 1 in 31 US children have autism, a marked increase from 2020. Kennedy has earlier claimed that vaccines cause autism which has been disproved by scientists. Experts have asserted autism is not a disease, but a neurodivergence that may cause developmental delays.

DOGE cuts another community service scheme

A 30-year-old community service programme that employees more than 2,000 people working on several projects related to housing, urban and rural development, lan conservation, disaster relief driving from one place to another across the US was the latest target of the Trump administration 's campaign to slash government spending. AmeriCorps' National Civilian Community Corps told volunteers that they would exit the programme early "due to programmatic circumstances beyond your control".

US shuts offices over China, Russia misinformation

The State Department has shut down the office of what is known ans Global engagement centre which sought to deal with misinformation and disinformation that Russia, China and Iran have been accused of spreading. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said it had taken actions to restrict freedom of speech in the United States and elsewhere. The centre has been a frequent target of criticism from conservatives for calling out media and online reports that it said are biased or untruthful.

Israeli strikes kill dozens in Gaza

DEIR- AL-BALAH, 17 APRIL

Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip overnight into Thursday killed at least 23 people, including a family of 10, local health officials reported. The bombardment, which resumed last month after a ceasefire ended, has killed hundreds and displaced vast numbers as Israel presses Hamas to accept changes to the truce.

A strike in Khan Younis killed five children, four women, and a man from the same family. In northern Gaza, nine children were among 13 killed.

The Israeli military claimed it targets Hamas and blames civilian deaths on the group's operations in populated areas.

The UN has warned that Gaza faces its worst humanitarian crisis since the conflict escalated in October 2023. Almost all of Gaza's two million residents now rely on charity kitchens for food, with prices soaring and supplies dwindling. Most people survive on one meal a day.

Water is also scarce, with residents receiving just 6 or 7 litres daily. Israel's Defence Minister said restricting aid is a pressure tactic against Hamas, which still holds 59 hostages. Hamas demands a full Israeli withdrawal, a lasting ceasefire, and prisoner exchange.

Over 51,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. *—PTI*

Mourners carry bodies of people killed when an Israeli airstrike struck their displacement tent in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

- Water is also scarce, with residents receiving just six or seven litres daily. Israel's Defence Minister said restricting aid is a pressure tactic against Hamas, which still holds 59 hostages.

2020 ANTI-TRUST TRIAL

Did not buy WhatsApp to quash competition: Zuck pleads innocence

WASHINGTON, 17 APRIL

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has emphasized in federal court that he bought Instagram and WhatsApp because he saw value in them and not to take out competitors, as the Federal Trade Commission alleges in a historic antitrust trial.

The lawsuit filed in 2020, claimed that Meta bought Instagram and WhatsApp to squash competition and establish an illegal monopoly in the social media market.

Zuckerberg took the stand, wrapping up his testimony as the first witness on 16 April. Meta attorney Mark Hansen argued that his client hardly has a monopoly in social media and still faces stiff global competition.

Zuckerberg said he's very focused on inventing new things and understanding what others are creating is a big part of the process.

Zuckerberg testified that people spend more time on YouTube than on Facebook and Instagram combined.

The FTC contends Meta has used a monopoly in its technology that facilitates connecting with friends and family to generate enormous profits as consumer satisfaction has dropped.

The case could force the tech giant to break off Instagram and WhatsApp.

Daniel Matheson, the FTC's attorney repeatedly cited Zuckerberg's own words in emails to show that he was more interested in halting Instagram's alarming growth than improving the product.

Zuckerberg insisted that he had acquired Instagram an independent brand.

Facebook bought Instagram, which was a photo-sharing app with no ads, for USD 1 billion in 2012.

Two years later, it purchased WhatsApp for USD 22 billion. *—PTI*

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg *PHOTO: X*

- Facebook bought Instagram, which was a photo-sharing app with no ads, for USD 1 billion in 2012. Two years later, it purchased WhatsApp for USD 22 billion.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

Rupee closes at 27P at 85.37 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

Rupee strengthened for fourth consecutive session and closed 27 paise higher at 85.37 against US dollar on Thursday, hitting the 3 April closing level, on the back of foreign fund inflows in domestic equities and broad weakness in the greenback. The unit has pared all its losses since 2 April, when US President Donald Trump announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs on multiple countries. On 2 April, rupee was quoted at 85.52 against US dollar. Rupee closed Wednesday's session with a gain of 16 paise at 85.64 against the dollar. —*PTI*

Alembic Pharma gets USFDA nod for generic drug

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Alembic Pharmaceuticals has announced that it has received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) to market Carbamazepine tablets (USP, 200 mg) in the United States. This approval allows the company to produce a generic version of the anti-convulsant medication, which is therapeutically equivalent to Novartis Pharmaceuticals' Tegretol Tablets, 200 mg. Carbamazepine tablets are indicated for use as an anticonvulsant and are also effective in treating pain associated with true trigeminal neuralgia. Market research firm IQVIA estimates that the market for Carbamazepine tablets USP, 200 mg was valued at approximately USD 32 million for the year ending December 2024. —*PTI*

Tata files record patent applications in FY25

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Tata Motors has reported filing a record 250 patents and 148 design applications in fiscal year 2025, the highest in its history. The filings focus on a wide range of innovations in products and processes, reflecting key automotive megatrends such as Connectivity, Electrification, Sustainability, and Safety (CESS), along with emerging technologies like hydrogen fuel cells. The Mumbai-based automotive giant also submitted 81 copyright applications and secured 68 patent grants, bringing its total number of granted patents to 918. Rajendra Petkar, President and Chief Technology Officer of Tata Motors, emphasised the company's commitment to pioneering technologies that support national development and address the evolving needs of customers and communities. —*PTI*

India, Brazil can collaborate in soybean sector

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

India's Agriculture Minister, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, has highlighted the potential for collaboration between India and Brazil in enhancing soyabean production and processing. His remarks followed a visit to a processing plant in Brazil, a leading supplier of soybean oil to India. "India and Brazil can work together not only to boost soybean production but also in the area of processing," Chouhan stated. Chouhan, who is currently in Brazil for the 15th Agriculture Ministers Meeting of the BRICS nations, explored investment opportunities in India's soybean processing sector. During his visit, he also toured tomato and maize farms, observing advanced farming techniques and irrigation practices that could benefit Indian farmers. The minister extended an invitation to a Brazilian delegation to visit India, aiming to foster collaboration in agriculture and explore opportunities for trade and technology transfer.—*PTI*

BluSmart cab services stay on halt after Sebi's action

BluSmart may merge with Uber; 8,000 taxis stay off the road

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

Electric cab-hailing platform BluSmart remained non-operational on Thursday. Iacross Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, and Mumbai, as the market regulator cracked down on its co-founder. It may exit business and function as fleet partner for its rival Uber

The suspension was followed by alleged misuse of funds at an affiliated company.

BluSmart app, that offered more than 8,000 taxis in the three metros, stopped taking bookings on Wednesday evening and remained unoperational on Thursday as well.

The sudden suspension puts the livelihood of thousands of drivers at risk and has led to customers venting out their frustration on social media.

The company, backed by BP Ventures - an arm of the global energy giant BP - did not immediately offer any comments on the issue.

"We've decided to temporarily close bookings on the BluSmart app," the firm said in an email.

Earlier this week, securities and exchange board of India (Sebi) banned brothers Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi from the stock market and ordered a forensic investigation into their listed renewable energy company Gensol.

The investigation focuses on allegations that they used funds intended for procuring electric vehicles to purchase luxury apartments.

The suspension was followed by alleged misuse of funds at an affiliated company PHOTO: ANI

- BluSmart app, that offered more than 8,000 taxis in the three metros, stopped taking bookings on Wednesday evening and remained unoperational on Thursday as well. The sudden suspension puts the livelihood of thousands of drivers at risk.

"I have almost 20K balance in BluSmart and today morning got this mail that BluSmart services are suspended. What is this???When can get the refund of BluSmart is getting closed," said a customer in a post on X on Wednesday.

BluSmart in the e-mail assured to initiate a refund to customers within 90 days.

"We truly appreciate your support. While we strive to be back soon, we will initiate a refund within 90 days if services do not resume before that," the e-mail said.

The company, as on 9 January, had a fleet of over 8,500 electric vehicles and a charging network of 5,800 stations across 50 hubs in Bengaluru and Delhi-NCR, and was supported by 10,000-plus active driver partners.

BluSmart's shareholders approved a plan to begin merge with Uber over the next few weeks —PTI

NEARLY 2% OF SURGE

Markets surge for 4th day amid US-Japan tariff talks

MUMBAI, 17 APRIL

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly two per cent on Thursday, registering their fourth day of rally as investors turned buoyant after foreign investors returned to domestic equities amid expectations of a breakthrough in US-Japan trade negotiations over reciprocal tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,508.91 points or 1.96 per cent to reclaim the 78,000 level. It finally settled at 78,553.20. During the day, it soared 1,572.48 points or 2.04 per cent to 78,616.77.

As many as 2,427 stocks advanced while 1,522 declined and 157 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty surged 414.45 points or 1.77 per cent to 23,851.65.

In four days, the BSE benchmark jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or 6.48 per cent.

"Benchmark indices posted sharp gains on Thursday to end the week on a high note, posting four consecutive sessions of gains. Broader Mid and Small caps also closed higher.

From the Sensex firms, Eternal, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Reliance Industries were among the biggest gainers.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra and Maruti were the laggards.

Stock markets will remain closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'. —*PTI*

Fitch cuts growth estimates by 10 bps to 6.4% in FY26

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Fitch Ratings has lowered India's growth forecast for 2025-26 by 10 basis points to 6.4 per cent. For 2026-27 the growth forecast is lowered by 20 basis points to 6.3 per cent.

The Reserve Bank of India also recently lowered the growth forecast for 2025-26 to 6.5 per cent from 6.7 per cent, amid uncertainties arising from trade wars following the reciprocal tariffs announced by the US. The global rating agency has similarly revised downward growth rates for several economies, including France, the UK, Eurozone, Australia, Canada, Germany, China and the US.

The Fitch quarterly Global Economic Outlook (GEO) cuts world growth in 2025 by 40 basis points and China and US growth by 50 basis points.

US annual growth is expected to remain at 1.2 per cent for 2025 but will slow to a crawl through the year at just 0.4 per cent in October-December 2025. China's growth is expected to fall below four per cent both this year and next, while growth in the eurozone will remain stuck well below one per cent.

World growth is projected to fall below two per cent this year. —*PTI*

- The Fitch quarterly Global Economic Outlook (GEO) cuts world growth in 2025 by 40 basis points and China and US growth by 50 basis points.

Infosys faces 11.7% decline in Q4

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

IT companies have face with loss Q4 of FY25.

India's second-largest IT company Infosys on Thursday reported an 11.7 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 7,033 crore for the March quarter. It had posted a profit (attributable to owners of the company) of Rs 7,969 crore in the year-ago period.

The company has exceeded its guidance for the full fiscal year. Infosys had raised the 2024-25 fiscal year revenue guidance to 4.5-5 per cent, up from 3.75-4.50 per cent. Revenues for the quarter under review came in at Rs 40,925 crore, 7.9 per cent higher from Rs 37,923 crore in Q4 FY24.

Sequentially, the company's profits rose 3.3 per cent, but revenues declined 2 per cent.

For the full FY25, profits saw a marginal increase of 1.8 per cent to Rs 26,713 crore, according to a regulatory filing. Revenues climbed 6.06 per cent to reach Rs 1,62,990 crore.

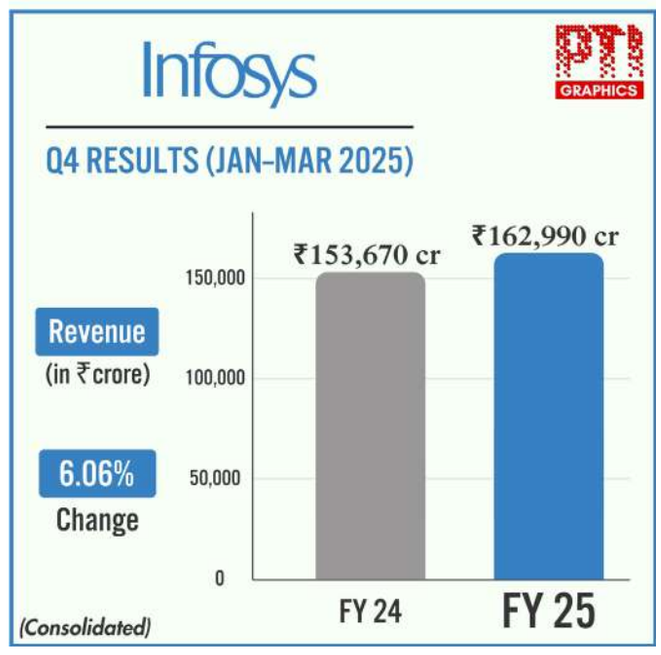
HDFC Life Insurance Assets under Management at Rs 3,36,282 lakh crore as on March 31, 2025, an increase of 15% year-on-year.

12 companies are expected to announce their results for Q4 of FY25 today, with big names like Infosys, Tata Elxsi, Jio Financial Services, and HDFC Life Insurance Co leading the pack.

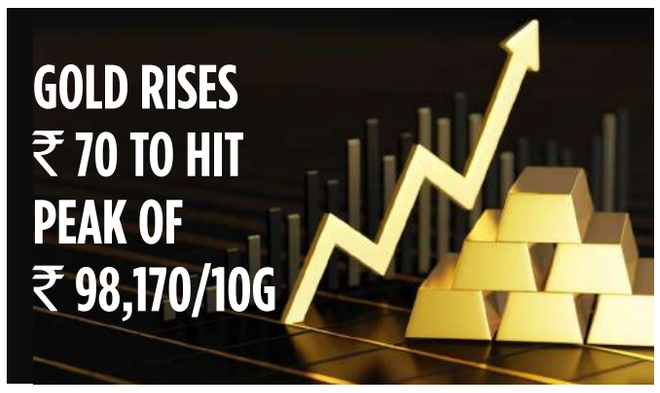
Infosys to acquire Australian cybersecurity

IT firm Infosys on Thursday said it has signed a definitive agreement to acquire Australian cybersecurity services firm The Missing Link in an all-cash deal of AUD 98 million (about Rs 532 crore).

Infosys will acquire the firm through its wholly-owned subsidiary Infosys Singapore Pte Ltd, according to a regulatory filing. The acquisition is expected to close during the first quarter (April-June) of FY26. —*PTI*



Infosys Q4 profit declines 11.7 pc to Rs 7,033 crore; revenue rises to Rs 40,925 crore PHOTO: PTI



NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Gold prices rose by Rs 70 to hit yet another record high of Rs 98,170 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday amid firm global demand, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Wednesday, gold of 99.9 per cent purity soared by Rs 1,650 to hit an all-time high of Rs 98,100 per 10g.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased by Rs 70 to touch a fresh peak of Rs 97,720 per 10g against Wednesday's closing level of Rs 97,650 per 10g.

Chintan Mehta, Chief Executive Officer at Abans Financial Services, said gold prices continue to surge as global uncertainty persists, with the US-China trade war disrupting supply chains and stoking fears of inflation and recession. As markets grapple with these risks, volatility remains elevated, reinforcing gold's role as a reliable hedge.

Meanwhile, spot gold rose to touch a record high of USD 3,357.81 per ounce in the overseas markets. —*PTI*

Stalin opens Rs 1882 cr AI-ready Sify Data Centre

CHENNAI, 17 APRIL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin inaugurated a new data centre campus established by Sify Technologies in Siruseri on Thursday.

The facility, which represents an investment of Rs 1,882 crore, is located within the SIPCOT Industrial Park and is expected to generate approximately 1,000 direct jobs.

This advanced data centre campus will have a capacity of 130 MW and is designed to be AI-ready.

Sify Technologies, a leading provider of integrated internet solutions, communication services, and data centre infrastructure, aims to invest around Rs 13,000 crore in Chennai by 2027.

The agreement for this initiative was formalised during the Global Investors Meet held in January 2024.

Sify, an advanced data centre campus will have a capacity of 130 MW and is designed to be AI-ready, in Chennai PHOTO: PTI

Chief Minister Stalin is committed to fostering employment opportunities and aims to transform Tamil Nadu into a USD 1 trillion economy by 2030 through various measures.

As part of this vision, Stalin launched the forward-looking Tamil Nadu Data Centre Policy in 2021, designed to position the state as a preferreddestination for investors in the data centre sector. —*PTI*

Gensol hits another lower circuit limit

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Shares of Gensol Engineering dropped five per cent on Thursday to hit the lower circuit limit after Sebi barred the firm and its promoters from securities markets till further orders in a fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The stock tanked 4.97 per cent to Rs 117.50 -- its lower circuit limit as well as record low -- on the BSE.

At the NSE, it slumped 5 per cent to Rs 116.54 -- the lowest trading permissible limit for the day as well as an all-time low.

From its 52-week high of Rs 1,125.75, the stock is now down 89.56 per cent.

GEL, said that its independent director Arun Menon has resigned with immediate effect. —*PTI*

PLAY STORE CASE

NCLAT allows Google to redact pvt data

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has directed removal of the extracts from a confidential letter having revenue information of Google, from its last month's judgement against the internet giant on the Play Store policy.

On 28 March, the appellate tribunal had upheld fair trade regulator Competition Commission of India (CCI) finding that the company's app store billing policy was unfair and restrictive for developers. However, it had slashed the penalty to almost a fourth to Rs 216 crore from Rs 936.44 crore.

Alphabet Inc and Google Inc. have moved NCLAT to remove Paragraphs 97 to 100 from the 104-page order, submitting a letter dated 6 October, 2022, which was a confidential document. This confidential document was in response to revenue information given by them. This had confidential revenue data.

Even the CCI's had maintained confidentiality.

It was found that Google's app store billing policy was unfair and restrictive for developers PHOTO: ANI

- The confidential document was in response to revenue information given by them which had confidential revenue data.

However, NCLAT, in the judgment on 28 March, had quoted extracts from the confidential document in paragraphs 97 to 100.

Alphabet and Google Inc. requested that confidentiality needs to be maintained and paragraphs 97 to 100 be redacted from the judgment as well as from the website and certified copy.

An NCLAT bench comprising Chairperson Justice Ashok Bhushan and Member Barun Mitra agreed to it.. —*PTI*

Wipro tanks over 4% in Q1 amid global uncertainties

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

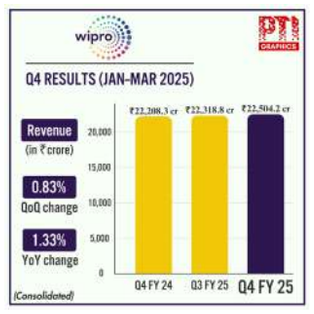
Shares of Wipro on Thursday ended over four per cent lower after the firm warned of a weak quarter ahead with up to 3.5 per cent expected drop in IT services revenue for Q1FY26, amid global uncertainties.

The stock tumbled 4.28 per cent to settle at Rs 236.90 on the BSE. During the day, it dropped 6.18 per cent to Rs 232.20. At the NSE, the stock declined 4.13 per cent to Rs 237.40. During the day, shares of the firm tanked 6.25 per cent to Rs 232.15.

The company's market valuation eroded by Rs 11,096.56 crore to Rs 2,48,088.80 crore.

Wipro on Wednesday reported a 25.9 per cent year-on-year rise in consolidated net profit for the March quarter to Rs 3,569.6 crore, but warned of a weak quarter ahead with up to 3.5 per cent expected drop in IT services revenue for Q1FY26, amid global uncertainties.

For Q1 FY26, the firm sees its IT services business revenue between USD 2,505 million and USD 2,557 million, a drop of 1.5-3.5 per cent in constant currency terms on a sequential basis. —*PTI*



Wipro Q4 PAT up 26 pc to Rs 3,569.6 crore; expects up to 3.5 pc drop in IT services revenue for Q1 FY26. PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Munaf fined 25% of match fee for Code of Conduct breach

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Delhi Capitals bowling coach Munaf Patel has been fined 25 percent of his match fee and accumulated one demerit point for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during the high-octane game against Rajasthan Royals here. The match went down to the wire on Wednesday night with DC winning the edge-of-the-seat thriller in a Super Over after both teams were tied at 188 runs. The former India pacer "admitted to the Level 1 offence under Article 2.20 of the IPL Code of Conduct, which pertains to the conduct contrary to the spirit of the game," said an IPL statement.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Scheffler rested and ready to defend his title at Hilton Head

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, 17 APRIL

Scottie Scheffler was the star attraction of a parade just two days after the Masters. This one was all about a red plaid jacket from Harbour Town, not a green jacket from Augusta National. The tradition of the RBC Heritage is for the defending champion to lead a half-mile parade that ends near the 18th green at Harbour Town, where he hits a ceremonial tee shot into the Calibogue Sound as a cannon is simultaneously fired. "I had some earplugs. It's always nice when a cannon is going off," Scheffler said. "It was a unique experience. I was glad just to be able to make contact with the ball and not embarrass myself out there."—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Raiza finishes fifth in women's skeet in Lima World Cup

LIMA, 17 APRIL

Paris Olympian Raiza Dhillon finished a creditable fifth after entering her first ISSF World Cup final in the women's skeet event on a day when India maintained their impressive run in the tournament here. At the end of the second competition day, India were second in the medals tally with two gold, one silver, and a bronze. China lead the standings. Raiza, a former junior world championship silver medallist and a bronze winner at the Asian Championships last year, enjoyed a solid final in a strong field before bowing out at the halfway stage of the 60-shot decider with 26 hits to her name. —*PTI*

Smriti named icon player of Ratnagiri Jets

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Indian vice-captain and batting superstar Smriti Mandhana has been appointed as the icon player of Ratnagiri Jets for the inaugural Women's Maharashtra Premier League (WMPL). Ratnagiri Jets have been the two-time champions of the men's MPL and now aim to advance women's cricket and inspire future talent in the sport by venturing into the WMPL. —*PTI*

RCB batters look to rise above PBKS

Punjab will be high on confidence after win over KKR in a recent low-scoring thriller

BENGALURU, 17 APRIL

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's push for a maiden home victory this season will depend on their batters taming the canny Yuzvendra Chahal in the IPL match against a supremely confident Punjab Kings here on Friday.

Chahal, in the company of off-spinner Glenn Maxwell, will have noticed Bengaluru batters' struggle against slow bowlers R Sai Kishore (2/22, Gujarat Titans), Kuldeep Yadav (2/17), and Vipraj Nigam (2/18, both Delhi Capitals) here, especially once the field was spread out. Besides, both Chahal and Maxwell will be armed with their familiarity with the conditions here, courtesy of the years spent at the Royal Challengers' dugout.

Theoretically, the RCB camp can take a slight consolation from the fact that they batted first against GT and DC, and their spinners took full advantage of a no-dew atmosphere.

But Chahal, who returned to form with a four-wicket haul against Kolkata Knight Riders, and Maxwell, assuming that dull form with the bat will not hinder his inclusion in the eleven on Friday, operate regardless of the conditions. Chahal is a master of lengths rather than of magic balls. The leg-spinner lures with offerings wide of the off-stump, and the batters need to reach out to the ball for big hits, often resulting in catches in the deep.

As a team, Punjab will be high on confidence after their 16-run win over KKR in a recent low-scoring thriller. But they will be well aware that RCB, which has depth in batting and bowling, will be a harder opponent to overcome. —*PTI*

RCB will face PBKS on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Win over KKR gave us belief, but we need to get better with each game

-Haddin, Punjab coach

RCB VS PBKS

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	33
PBKS Won:	17
RCB Won:	16

RCB vs PBKS Match starts at **7.30 pm IST**

Axar backs McGurk, says the Australian is a game-changer

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Delhi Capitals skipper Axar Patel conceded that his team has struggled with shaky starts with Jake Fraser-McGurk yet to fire this season, but backed the Australian to be a game-changer once he finds his rhythm. The 23-year-old opener, who lit up the tournament in his maiden season last year with his power-hitting, has looked a shadow of himself in this edition. His ongoing struggles at the top continued in DC's dramatic Super Over win against Rajasthan Royals, as he perished inside the Powerplay for the fifth time this season. "I have a different opinion. If you don't get a start, we are still doing well. So you have that cushion that you can go from the same team," Axar told reporters on Wednesday. As the IPL reaches its halfway stage, the jovial all-rounder has emerged as the tournament's most successful captain, steering his side to five wins in six games. "I was captaining for state cricket, I know what to do and what not to do. And when you get a chance to run the team as you want and play the way you want to play, then why not?" said Axar. —*PTI*

NWU POTCH INVITATIONAL

Chopra records 84.52m throw to secure gold

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Star Indian javelin thrower and two-time Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra has started his new season on a high as he secured the gold medal at the NWU Potch Invitational in South Africa on Thursday with a brilliant 84.52m throw. Chopra topped the six-man field, hurling the spear to a distance of 84.52m at the World Athletics Continental Tour Challenger event on Wednesday. The Indian star finished ahead of 25-year-old South African Douw Smit, whose best throw was 82.44m But Chopra's effort was below his personal best of 89.94m, while Douw came close to his personal best of 83.29m. Chopra and Smit were the only two athletes to cross the 80m mark in the competition. Another South African, Duncan Robertson, finished third with an effort of 71.22m. Chopra has been training in Potchefstroom under his new coach Jan Zelezny of Czech Republic, who is a three-time Olympic champion and the world record holder. The 27-year-old parted ways with his long-time coach, Bartonietz, last year. Chopra is scheduled to begin his elite-level campaign at the Doha Diamond League on 16 May.—*PTI*

BCCI removes assistant coach Nayar; support staff set for overhaul

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Just eight months into the biggest assignment of his career, it could be curtains for Mumbai stalwart Abhishek Nayar as the Indian cricket team's assistant coach amid speculation that he has fallen out with a high-profile member of the support staff.

If board sources are to be believed, Nayar has already been informed of the BCCI's decision to part ways with him.Fielding coach T Dilip and Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai are also on their way out after completing more than three years in their respective positions.

The new Standard Operating Procedure of the BCCI has capped the support staff's tenure at three years.It is learnt that India's first ever Strength and Conditioning coach Adrian Le Roux is likely to return for a second stint.

The South African is widely credited for ushering in a new fitness culture in the then Sourav Ganguly-led Indian team during the 2003 World Cup. When BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia was contacted by the PTI, he neither confirmed nor denied the development."Certain things are being finalised. You will receive a press note from BCCI in a few days," Saikia sai,d asked about the swirling speculation. The 41-year-old Nayar, a former all-rounder who played three ODIs but was largely a domestic stalwart with 103 first-class games. —*PTI*

NADAL TO BE HONORED WITH A TRIBUTE AT THE FO

PARIS, 17 APRIL

Retired 14-time champion Rafael Nadal will receive a tribute at the French Open on Court Philippe-Chatrier on 25 May, the tournament's opening day.

"Rafa has left his mark on the history of the French Open in so many ways, that's why a tribute ceremony will be held in his honor," French Open director Amélie Mauresmo said on Thursday. "We want the tribute to be special, exceptional. We want it to be a surprise for everyone."

Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam champion who retired in November, already has a statue rising in the alleys of the clay court Grand Slam. He will also feature in an exhibition in the tournament museum and lend his voice to the official French Open trailer.

"We wanted to do the tribute last year, to be transparent, but he refused at the time," Mauresmo said. "He wasn't sure that it was his last Roland Garros. Now that he is retired, he is happy to receive it."

Nadal holds the record for the most French Open titles with 14. His last appearance at the tournament was in 2024 when he lost to Alexander Zverev in the first round.

"Rafael Nadal and Roland Garros are inseparable. We have a strong history together," said Gilles Moretton, president of the French Tennis Federation. "Amélie and I went to see him not long ago because we wanted to do something important for him. We still had some frustration from last year."

Organizers also plan to build on the success of the 2024 Paris Olympics by setting up a fan zone with giant screens showing matches.

Located at Place de la Concorde in central Paris, the venue will be free and open to up to 5,000 fans. —*PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Newcastle routs Palace 5-0

LONDON, 17 APRIL

Newcastle thrashed Crystal Palace 5-0 Wednesday for its second big win in four days and climbed to third place in the Premier League.

Four of the goals came in the first half at St. James' Park, through Jacob Murphy, Harvey Barnes, Fabian Schar, as well as an unfortunate own-goal by Marc Guehi. Sandwiched between them was a lazily taken penalty for Palace by

Eberechi Eze that was saved by Newcastle goalkeeper Nick Pope. Alexander Isak added a fifth goal in the 58th minute for his 21st of the campaign as Saudi-controlled Newcastle followed up its 4-1 hammering of Manchester United on Sunday to make it six wins in a row in all competitions. That streak included a victory over Liverpool in the English League Cup final for a first major trophy in 70 years. Newcastle jumped above Nottingham Forest and within four points of second-place Arsenal, and looks in good shape for a return to the Champions League next season. —*PTI*

Avinash Sable to run in season-opening DL

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

National record-holding 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable will feature in the season-opening Diamond League Meeting in Xiamen, China on April 26, which will have a top-class field, including reigning Olympic and world champion Soufiane El Bakkali of Morocco.

Paris Olympics and World Championships bronze medallist Abraham Kibiwot of Kenya, who had beaten Sable for gold in the 2022 Commonwealth Games, is also in the fray. Sable is competing for the first time since the Diamond League Final in September last year, where he finished ninth with a time of 8 minutes and 17.09 seconds.The 30-year-old's national record stands at 8:09.91.

He finished 11th at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games with a time of 8:14.18.He has already qualified for the World Championships in September in Tokyo on the basis of the Paris Olympics timing.

Sable is set to miss the 21-24 April Federation Cup National Championships in Kochi. —*PTI*

Avinash Sable won the men's 3000-meter steeplechase final event at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou PHOTO: PTI

Van Dijk signs new Liverpool contract

LIVERPOOL, 17 APRIL

Virgil van Dijk has joined Mohamed Salah in signing a new contract with Liverpool.

Van Dijk's deal was to expire at the end of the season, but the Netherlands center back has penned a new, two-year contract."I'm very happy, very proud," Van Dijk told Liverpool's official website on Thursday. "There are so many emotions that go through my head right now, speaking about it. "It's a proud feeling, it's a feeling of joy. It's just incredible. The journey I've had so far in my career, to be able to extend it with another two years at this club is amazing, and I'm so happy."

A two-year extension for Salah, Liverpool's star forward, was announced last week. The 33-year-old Van Dijk has proven to be as important a figure for Liverpool as Salah since joining from Southampton at the start of 2018 for $100 million —*PTI*

FIGHT AGAINST DOPING

Mansukh inaugurates Athlete Passport

NEW DELHI, 17 APRIL

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya inaugurated an Athlete Passport Management Unit (APMU) at the National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL) in New Delhi on Thursday, making India the 17th country in the world to have a dedicated system for tracking blood and steroidal profiles of athletes over a period of time.

The APMU will serve as a specialised body responsible for monitoring and managing the biological passports of athletes.

A biological passport compiles data on an athlete's variables such as blood parameters, hormonal levels, and other physiological markers to detect doping.

- F Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya inaugurated an Athlete Passport Management Unit (APMU) at the National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL) in New Delhi on Thursday

The APMU keeps a tab on "anomalies or trends indicative of doping" without directly identifying banned substances.

"APMU is a key milestone in India's fight against doping, enabling the longitudinal tracking of Athletes' Biological profiles through the Athlete Biological Passport (ABP) system. This innovative mechanism will help in detecting doping patterns and protect the fairness of sports by identifying unethical practices," Mandaviya said at the inauguration.

Mandaviya said India's APMU will also help neighbouring countries that don't have enough resources to set up similar systems.

The NDTL's APMU aligns with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) guidelines, strengthening the anti-doping programme globally.

India joins countries like China, the USA, Germany, France, Australia and Japan among others to have an APMU at its WADA-accredited dope testing facility.

The inauguration was also attended by Sujata Chaturvedi, Secretary (Sports), Kunal, Joint Secretary, and other officers of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, including Dr. P.L. Sahu, Director and CEO, NDTL. —*PTI*

Injured Mbappe jeered in Real Madrid's QF exit

MADRID, 17 APRIL

There will be no Champions League title for Kylian Mbappe in his first season with Real Madrid. After several failed attempts with Paris Saint-Germain, Mbappé joined the record 15-time European Champion , bidding to finally break through with the title. But he couldn't help Madrid complete its run for the trophy and was jeered by a section of the Santiago Bernabeu stadium crowd.

With Mbappé struggling before limping off with an ankle injury, Madrid lost 2-1 to Arsenal on Wednesday and was eliminated 5-1 on aggregate after a 3-0 first-leg loss in London last week. Arsenal will now face Mbappe's former club, PSG, which advanced over Aston Villa on Tuesday and has been thriving this season. Mbappé, who hasn't scored in five games in all competitions, had no attempts on target on Wednesday. He had to be replaced by Brahim Díaz in the 75th minute after twisting his right ankle, and most of the crowd jeered the France forward when his substitution was announced. —*PTI*